# THE HISTORY OF ROCK

## 1987

A MONTHLY TRIP THROUGH MUSIC'S GOLDEN YEARS

THIS ISSUE: 1987

## U2

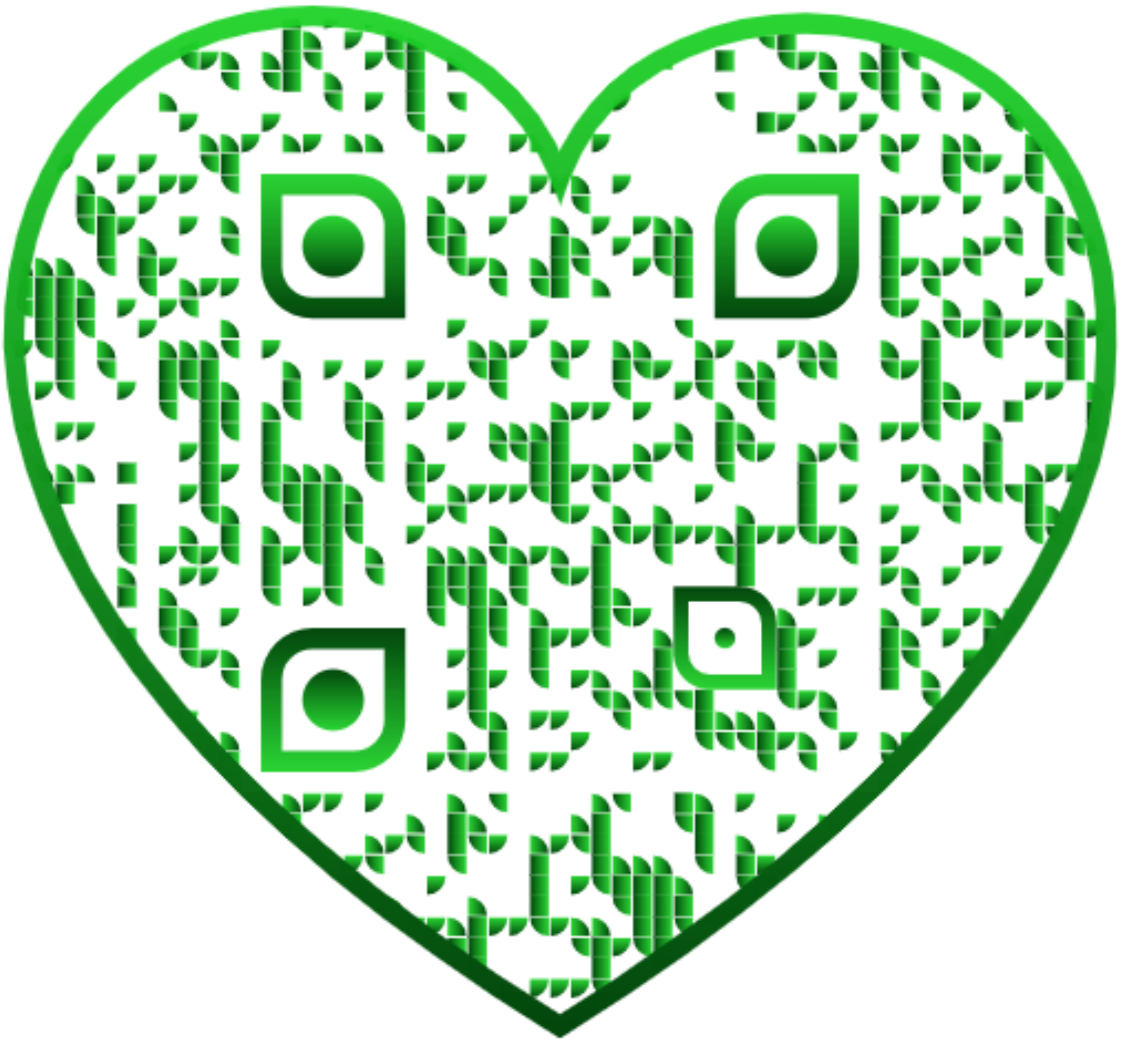
*30 years of The Joshua Tree*

STARRING...

- THE CURE
- BEASTIE BOYS
- THE SMITHS
- TOM WAITS
- PRIMAL SCREAM
- GEORGE MICHAEL
- GUNS N' ROSES
- HAPPY MONDAYS
- REM

PLUS! PIXIES | BOB DYLAN | BJÖRK | THE FALL | MADONNA | THE POGUES

★ FROM THE ARCHIVES OF NME & MELODY MAKER ★



# Welcome to 1987

**THE 1980s HAVE** given it a bit of a rough ride so far, but this year marks a spirited return for rock. The Beastie Boys have leaped to notoriety sampling Led Zeppelin, while Def Jam producer Rick Rubin has worked a powerful transformation on The Cult. Also on Def Jam, hip hop band Public Enemy are described as "the best rock group in the world".

Energy, attitude, sedition… Rock's abiding principles are this year to be found in plenty of different places. In the grassroots noise of small and disreputable UK bands who play something called "grebo". In the swashbuckling, bad-reputation riffs of Guns N' Roses. In the cathartic, political new album by REM, which provides a disturbing snapshot of America.

America is also a focus for our cover stars, U2. This year they use their mastery of extravagant gestures and stirring dynamics to deliver their hardest and most focused album yet, *The Joshua Tree*. It's rock at its best: noisy, moving and politically charged.

As ever, there are magnificent exceptions to the rule. From Iceland, The Sugarcubes and their singer Björk arrive from a place completely outside the western rock tradition. From the north-west of the UK, meanwhile, originality of the most thrilling kind derives from The Fall and a faintly villainous new concern called the Happy Mondays. A pair of conceptualists called The Justified Ancients Of Mu Mu participate in music to steal from, subvert and liberate it.

This is the world of *The History Of Rock*, a monthly magazine which follows each turn of the rock revolution. Whether in sleazy dive or huge arena, passionate and stylish contemporary reporters were there to chronicle events. This publication reaps the benefits of their understanding for the reader decades later, one year at a time. Missed one? You can find out how to rectify that on page 138.

In the pages of this 23rd edition, dedicated to 1987, you will find verbatim articles from frontline staffers, filed from the thick of the action, wherever it may be.

With Tom Waits, in a bar with an inscrutable waiter and a stopped clock. On tour in the Bible Belt with the Beastie Boys and their inflatable stage penis. Discovering how, these days, his band's enormous success means Bono has a whole new circle of acquaintances.

"I met Muhammad Ali," he says. "He's a big U2 fan."

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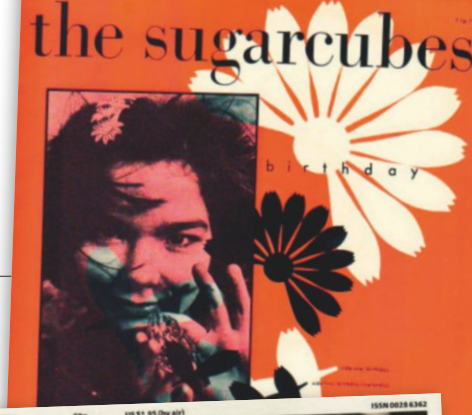


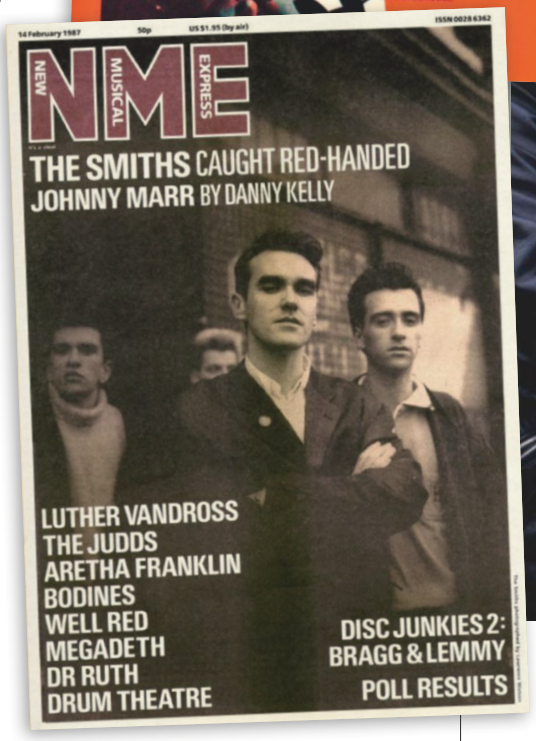

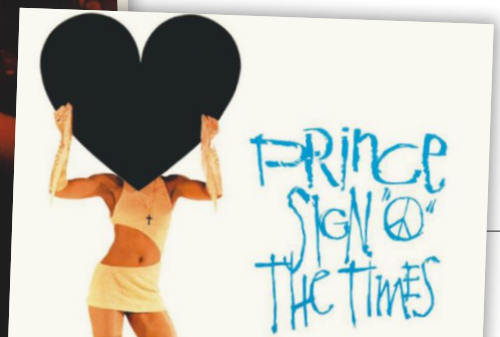


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THE HISTORY OF ROCK

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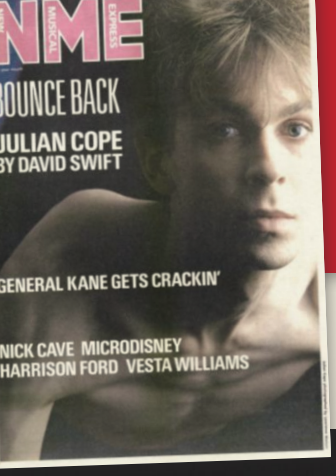



# 1987

JANUARY – MARCH

## THE SMITHS, THE CULT, U2, BEASTIE BOYS, BIG BLACK AND MORE

**Released on March 30, 1987, Prince's ninth album, *Sign O' The Times*, ranges widely in style, reflecting the tracks' origins in three abandoned album projects**

# Title track already a hit

## NME MARCH 21 Times for new album from Prince.

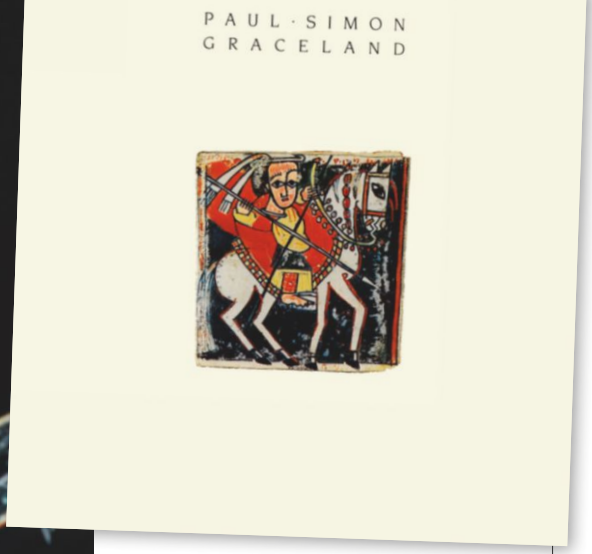
**PRINCE RELEASES HIS** new album on Monday, his first since disbanding The Revolution. It's a 13-track double called *Sign O' The Times* and the title track is already a Top 20 hit. Recorded late last year at Paisley Park in Minneapolis, it was produced, arranged, written and performed almost solely by Prince, with a few notable exceptions.

Two former Revolution members, Dr Fink and Eric Leeds (the latter now with the new Paisley Park outfit Madhouse) have performing and songwriting credits on the album and Sheena Easton contributes vocals on one track.

Titles includes "Starfish & Coffee", "Slow Love", "It's Gonna Be A Beautiful Night" and "U Got The Look".

ILPO MUSTO / REX FEATURES

April 7–13, 1987: Paul Simon plays six sold-out shows at the Royal Albert Hall as Jerry Dammers, Paul Weller and Billy Bragg protest outside




# "I am no expert on South African politics"

**NME FEB 7** The controversial tale of Paul Simon's *Graceland* – now on tour.

**IN THE SUMMER** of 1984, Paul Simon is sent a tape of *Gumboots Accordion Jive Vol 2*, which he plays regularly in his car. This influences his decision to make an album inspired by African music. The tape came from South Africa. "I first thought, 'Too bad it's not from Zimbabwe, Zaire or Nigeria, life would have been more simple.'"

Simon then consulted the black musician Quincy Jones, who told him to "respect musicians", and during a period in which he refused invitations to appear at Sun City in the South African homeland of Bophuthatswana, he prepared to record in Johannesburg.

After taking part in "We Are The World" for the Band Aid project, Simon books several weeks of recording time in a South African studio, where he cuts five tracks from his album using South African musicians who are reputedly paid three times the normal union rates. The recording sessions coincide with the second Sharpeville massacre and several musicians are forced to leave the sessions early to abide by South Africa's racist pass laws.

In March 1986, some of the South African musicians are flown to New York to record more tracks and in April the Graceland album is completed. On its release in the UK, *Graceland* was criticised for not attacking the apartheid system, but was generally well received on a musical level. Simon told New York's *Village Voice*: "I'm not good at writing politics, I'm a relationship writer, relationships and introspection."

The extensive sleevenotes on the back of the album also contain nothing that can be construed as anti-apartheid, fuelling rumours in the music press that Simon had signed an agreement with the government of the Republic of South Africa, preventing his from criticising the Botha regime.

During a month in which the state-authorised radio stations in South Africa are playing tracks from *Graceland*, Simon is interviewed by *SPIN* magazine, apparently after checking the credentials of the magazine's writer. He tells *SPIN*: "I thought it was in the guidelines of the cultural boycott, although technically I wasn't."

> "I don't feel, as an artist, that I have to consult with anyone. I didn't ask permission"

After announcing a European tour, including several dates in Britain, Simon flies to London to record with Ladysmith Black Mambazo and announces that prominent anti-apartheid musicians Hugh Masekela and Miriam Makeba will also be performing with him on the European tour. His manager agrees the *NME* can interview Simon, on condition that Miriam Makeba and Hugh Masekela are present. The next morning, his record company WEA withdraw the offer.

A telex sent from the African National Congress in Lusaka to their office in Sweden says: "The ANC fully support a boycott action against a Paul Simon European and American tour... He has singularly done more harm in flouting the cultural boycott against the racist regime."

Simon's record company arrange an emergency press conference in London.

Accompanied by exiled South African musicians Miriam Makeba and Hugh Masekela and resident South African musician Ray Perry, Paul Simon opened the conference by reading a short letter he'd written to the United Nations Committee Against Apartheid. He'd drafted it after the UN had requested he clarify his position regarding the cultural boycott in light of growing criticism – from the African National Congress and related anti-apartheid bodies – of his *Graceland* LP and his upcoming European tour. The letter stated that in his own field Simon was working to achieve "the end of the apartheid system" and that he intended to maintain this position "in the context of the UN cultural boycott".

Since the letter had been received, Simon – through American anti-apartheid organiser Harry Belafonte – had been informed that the ANC had reversed their position over *Graceland*, withdrawing criticism and regarding the LP as legitimate. This position, he now said, would soon be confirmed by ANC leader Oliver Tambo at a press conference in Los Angeles.

Simon said he welcomed the controversy that had accompanied the album as it allowed people "essentially on the same side to clarify their position and reach a unified standpoint".

But hadn't he flouted this unity by not previously consulting or making public his

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intention to record *Graceland* in South Africa, an action liable to cause division?

"I don't feel, as an artist, that I have to consult with anyone. I didn't ask for permission to do the project, nor did I want any restriction on what I might think or say or write."

If it was his avowed intention to work for the end of apartheid, why had there not been any mention of the South African situation in the album's songs or extensive sleevenotes?

"It is a musical album; I approached the subject from a cultural point of view that has political implications, but I am no expert on South African politics."

Ray Perry outlined his impassioned support for *Graceland* (both album and tour) as it allowed South African musicians to be heard around the world; the cultural boycott was used wrongly if it prevented this.

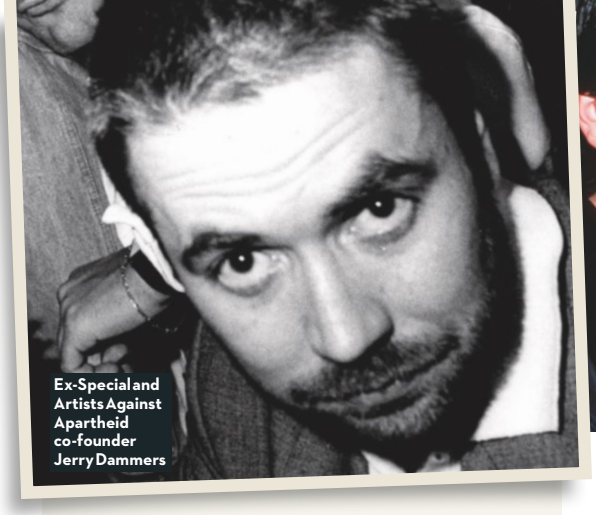
"I know better than some person who has been away from South Africa for 20 years how to run my life. If I'm told I am not allowed certain records or to perform, by my brothers as well as the government, where am I to run to? Emotionally we would die."

Miriam Makeba underlined her credentials as an exile and apartheid opponent for over 20 years and told how persistent representations to the UN by her on Simon's behalf revealed that he had never been put on the boycott list. However, she too felt that a cultural boycott should not deprive indigenous black musicians from being heard outside their own country, and that the whole policy was in need of clarification and redefinition. Masekela took up her point, saying the "policy" was ill-formed and put together without proper, widespread consultation with exiled musicians such as himself.

For Simon, the issue of cultural boycott seemed to rest on the decision to play or not play Sun City. He had not, for instance, requested that his album be withdrawn from the South African market: "It was made by South African musicians, why should it not be available to them?"

He denied too that he had had any personal contact with the South African government before he had been allowed to work in South Africa. Though the possibility that representations by well-placed Warners personnel could have facilitated the album's recording still remained, Simon felt no need to forward an anti-apartheid message explicitly on the album because "the audience I am used to addressing is a sophisticated one. I assume they know what's happening in South Africa, and if they don't, the first time they hear about it shouldn't be from a pop star. Pop music is not a place to argue complex political issues."

Simon maintained that he had nothing to apologise for, and pending clarification of the ANC policy – perhaps revoking the Lusaka telex – the controversy over *Graceland* looks still to have some way to run. *Gavin Martin*



Ex-Special and Artists Against Apartheid co-founder Jerry Dammers

# "The same mistake"

## NME FEB 2 Jerry Dammers gives *NME* a statement about Paul Simon.

**IN LASTWEEK'S *NME*,** the anti-apartheid movement was accused of a "climb-down" over Paul Simon's tour. The movement had not announced any boycott action, so how can it have climbed down? It seems that the movement is going to take flak from some people no matter what it does on this issue.

Paul Simon must have known this tour would be controversial at a time when we need unity to fight apartheid. I can't speak for Artists Against Apartheid, but as an individual, I think it's very irresponsible for a pop star to walk into a country where children are being slaughtered in the streets and make a pop LP, as if nothing is going on, especially without consulting the right people (ie, the ANC) first.

Simon has said that he paid the musicians $400 a day, supposedly three times the going rate. In this country, this is the minimum Musicians Union session rate for 15 hours' work (£262.50p). He also said he didn't perform in South Africa, but in the Oxford dictionary to "perform" includes to "sing or play".

At his press conference in London, he claimed that the ANC had "reversed" its policy and that the president, Oliver Tambo, would make a ruling on his individual case a few days later. No such thing happened, of course.

To get things into perspective, I'd like to quote a statement by the National Executive Committee of the ANC on the occasion of their 75th anniversary, presented by Oliver Tambo on January 8, 1987: "We can truly say that we have broken through a critical barrier in terms of both world understanding of what is to be done about the apartheid system and the unwillingness of the international community to act. The conditions therefore exist, that in the current period, this community should impose both unilateral and universal comprehensive mandatory sanctions against racist South Africa. Where governments refuse to act, the public at large should respond with people's sanctions. Now is the time for deeds and not words."

It seems that some people, because they quite like *Graceland*, keep trying to find excuses for Simon. I just wish he'd never gone to South Africa in the first place. And I think he may be making the same mistake again by carrying on with this tour.

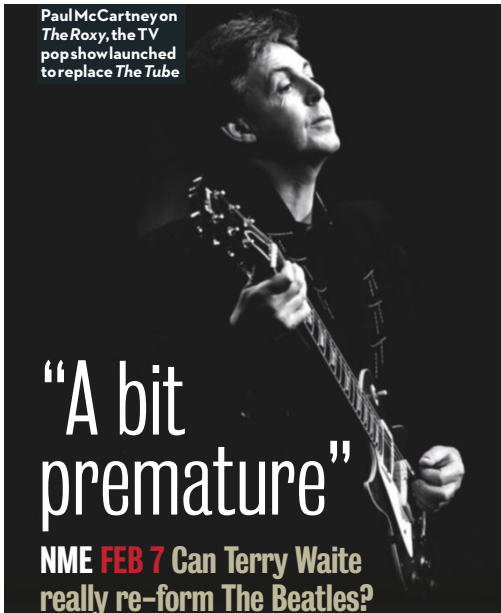
*The Tube* presenters Jools Holland and Paula Yates

# "All the groovy fuckers"

## NME JAN 24 *Tube* trouble for Jools.

**TYNE TEES PROMPTLY** put the squeeze on Jools Holland last Friday following a live cross-channel promotion spot, during which the *Tube* presenter temporarily lost his marbles and advised "all the groovy fuckers" among his school-age listeners to tune in to the pride of pop shows. Peter Moth, controller of public affairs for Tyne Tees TV, later told *NME*: "Jools came out with the offending word for reasons which he can't explain… Afterwards Jools was distraught and he apologised on *The Tube*. However, there was no choice but to suspend Jools as far as *The Tube* is concerned."

STEVE RICHARDS / REX FEATURES, REX FEATURES (2)

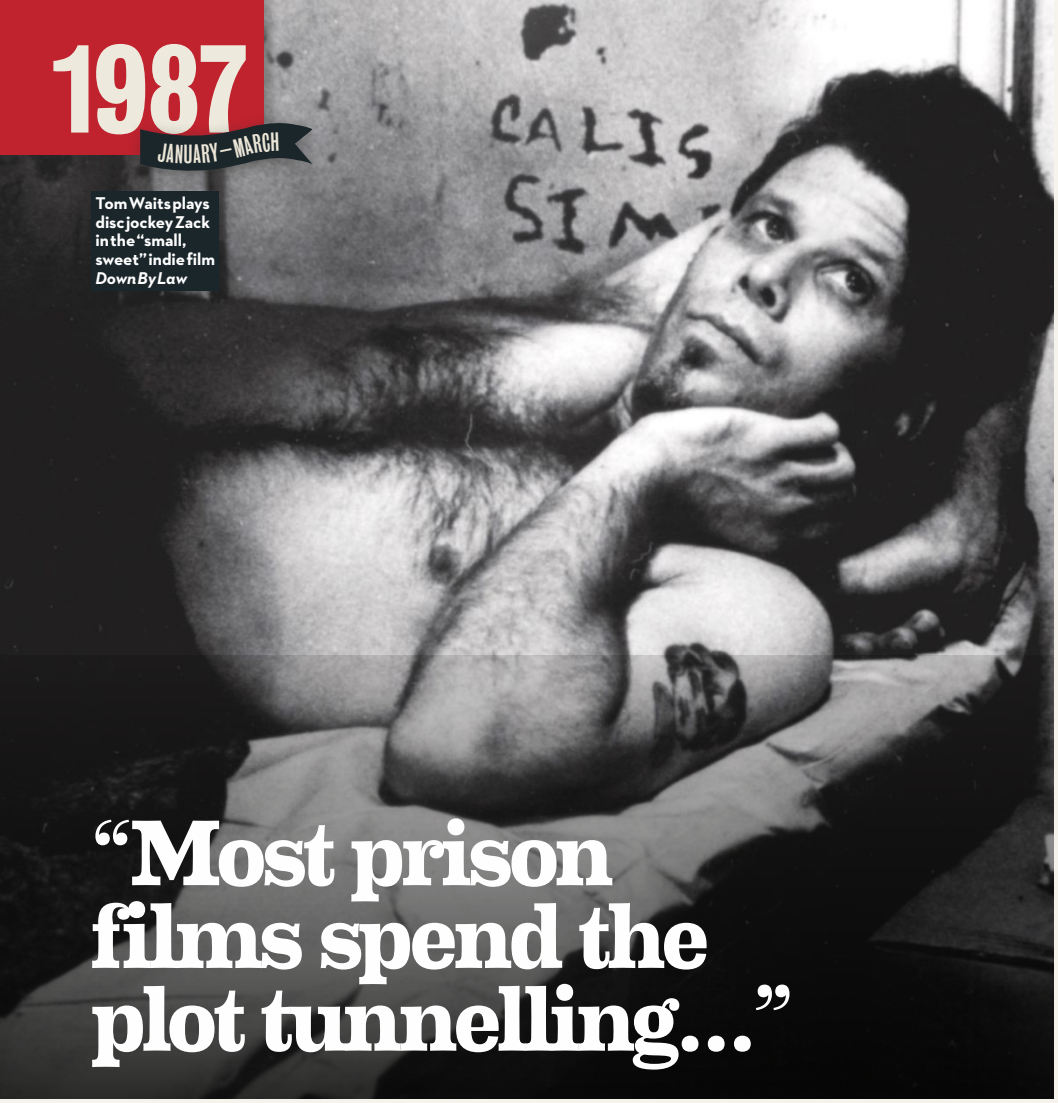


Paul McCartney on *The Roxy*, the TV pop show launched to replace *The Tube*

# "A bit premature"

## NME FEB 7 Can Terry Waite really re-form The Beatles?

**TERRY WAITE'S HOPES** for reuniting The Beatles (with one obvious absentee) have experienced a bit of a hiccup this week with an official denial from the Paul McCartney office. A spokesman said that Macca had heard of the plan for the One World concerts this July, but would be unable to take part: "The organisers have been a bit premature announcing lots of big names in the national press without getting any of them confirmed. Obviously, it's given them a lot of publicity, but whether the event will actually go ahead on the scale they'd hoped is doubtful."



Tom Waits plays disc jockey Zack in the "small, sweet" indie film *Down By Law*

# "Most prison films spend the plot tunnelling..."

**MM JAN 17** Director Jim Jarmusch on his Tom Waits–starring *Down By Law*.

**ALL YEAR, JOURNALISTS** returning from film festivals have been telling me I've gotta watch out for Jim Jarmusch's *Down By Law*, it's a movie with me in mind. I'd even started to build up a certain resistance to it and to the typecasting, when, all of a sudden, here was a sneak preview and I seemed to be laughing louder than anyone else in the theatre.

Jarmusch has called it a "neo-beat-noir-comedy", which is as good a label as any for a movie which deliberately refuses conscription on most ground. In recent years, probably *Repo Man* comes closes to its wacky freewheeling spirit, and maybe, decades back, Truffaut's *Shoot The Pianist*.

Tom Waits, an unemployed disc-jockey, and John Lurie, a small-time pimp, both get set up by the New Orleans police. Waits is planted with a corpse in the boot of his car, Lurie with a 10-year-old girl in a hotel bedroom, and the two disgruntled small-timers wind up in the same cell at Louisiana Pen. They snarl and fight in the confined space until one day the door opens to admit a new convict, Roberto Benigni, who doesn't speak English.

"*Momento*," he says, and flicks through his phrasebook until he finds a conversational gambit. "If-a looks could-a-kill, I am dead now," he reads. But Roberto is an intellectual and a dreamer and, despite the lack of a common language, he takes over leadership from the two morose cons and coaxes them into his poetic dream-world. He leads them out of prison through a secret tunnel and into the trackless bayou, and finally discovers a highly improbably beanery called Luigi's Tin Top managed by a beautiful Italian girl. Roberto's faith in movie logic pays off.

The director of this small, sweet movie is tall, prematurely grey-haired, intensely intellectual and dressed like one of Tom Waits' characters. Black leather jacket, shiny black shirt with a crumpled collar, black trousers and a perpetual Camel posted in his mug.

Was *Down By Law* made with me and my type of punter in mind?

"I had an interesting conversation with David Puttnam," drawled Jarmusch in his slow Ohio baritone. "He said, 'If you want to make a film for people you'd like if you met them, then your film will lie in a budget of two million dollars. If you make a film for people you *might* like if you met them, it'd be five million dollars. If you made a film for people you wouldn't like at all – 10 million.'

"I think that's a ridiculous statement, but it's interesting, and I consider meeting people like Puttnam part of my education.

"I'd like to reach as many people as possible, without doing market analysis in my head. I don't consider my work to be mainstream, so I won't be disappointed if I stay with a cult audience. I don't need a lot of money to make films, since I'm not into spectacle or special effects. There are expensive actors that I like, but there are so many talented people not as well known that I know. I also have an aversion to movie stars. The only good movie star is a dead movie star."

Actually, *Down By Law*, which was well received at Cannes, was currently No 1 at the box office in Paris, and doing good biz in the hipper US cities. Beautifully shot in black-and-white by Robby Müller in Louisiana, it has the feel of countless pulp thrillers, B-movies and swamp blues. Jarmusch is a fan of all that, of course, from Jim Thompson to Mickey Spillane, and the film that he'd really like to make – or remake, since Warner Bros made a perversion of the James M Cain novel for Mario Lanza – is *Serenade*.

Unlike whodunnits, pulp thrillers run on atmosphere rather than plot. What logic there is seems to come from the writer's subconscious, so that scenes jolt into frame like events in a nightmare. Jarmusch's screen writing follows this procedure too.

"I have faith in accidents. I like to de-emphasise the story, and that lets me get away with things the audience would never fall for if I was concentrating on the plot. For example, the fact that Tom and John and Roberto escape from prison with no explanation, you know. Most prison films spend most of the plot tunnelling. I find it annoying that most American films are so overwritten that the audience is one step ahead of the plot.

"They're predictable – but I guess audiences respond to formulas. I write backwards from the way most people write. I start with the characters and a certain atmosphere in mind, and I sit back and let the story appear to me."

*Down By Law* developed out of a creative collaboration with Tom Waits on a screenplay of *Franks Wild Years*, which Tom finally junked, doing it on stage instead. John Lurie of the Lounge Lizards had been in a previous Jarmusch movie, *Stranger Than Paradise*. A chance meeting with Italian comedian Roberto Benigni, and the fact that they could communicate deeply without language, gave the director his key ingredient.

> **"I don't need a lot of money to make films, since I'm not into spectacle or special effects"**

"Tom and I have a kinda kindred aesthetic, an interest in unambitious people, marginal people. Roberto, like most Italians, is very open about his emotions, and he speaks with his eyes, his hands, his gestures. A lot of the lines I wrote for him he had to memorise, and he didn't even know why they were funny. At the start of filming he spoke even less English than his character, but by the end he was about equal.

"The point of the film is that the two American characters are not in touch with themselves like Roberto is. His imagination is open, and he understands the lifeline of American culture – Whitman and Robert Frost are specific examples – even though he's had to follow it in translation. Maybe

ALAMY

that's true of Europeans in general."

Manuel from *Fawlty Towers* will appear to be a blood relative to Roberto for British audiences, though Jarmusch has never heard of him. Harpo Marx and Harry Langdon, the great silent comic mimes, seemed close to him. Prison escapes across the bayou, pursued by baying bloodhounds, go all the way back to *I Am A Fugitive From A Chain Gang* of 1932.

"Right," says Jarmusch, a mine of movie lore. "Paul Muni hides under the swamp water and breathes through a reed."

He has an enviable film background as teaching assistant to Nicholas Ray at NYU Graduate Film School. He worked with Ray and Wim Wenders on *Lightning Over Water*, the weird movie which chronicled the death of Ray over a period of time by cancer. Wenders has been accused of playing the vulture.

"Not true. Nick wanted the film made and he coerced Wim into doing it. If Wim had resisted it would've been, 'Fuck you, you're not my friend any more!' It was very hard on Wim and a painful experience for everybody.

"I learned so much from him. Nick had studied architecture with Frank Lloyd Wright originally, and he taught me that to make a film work, each building block has to work. Each scene has a single meaning – though it may mean different things to different characters in that scene, and when you talk to your actors you don't tell one what you told the other one.

"I think Nick was more deceptive with actors than I'm able to be. He'd intentionally throw a wrench in the works to subvert the predictability of the script."

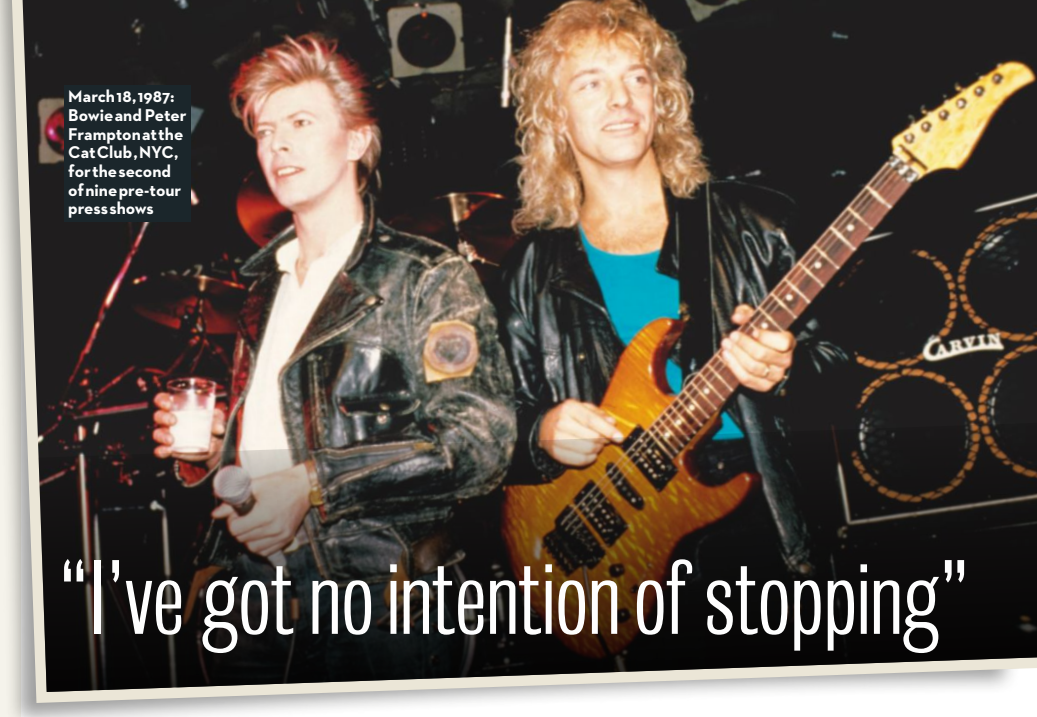
And Ray's concern for teenagers? *Rebel Without A Cause*, *They Live By Night*, *Knock On Any Door*.

Genuine, affirmed Jarmusch.

"He wanted to reach young people at the point where they could be subverted into false values. He really felt that was a prime state to catch them in." *Brian Case*


"A TERRIFIC MOVIE
...a beautiful, melancholy, kidding escape fantasy."
—David Denby, NEW YORK MAGAZINE

DOWN BY LAW

March 18, 1987: Bowie and Peter Frampton at the Cat Club, NYC, for the second of nine pre-tour press shows

# "I've got no intention of stopping"

## NME MAR 28 Bowie's back! Now, with old school pal Peter Frampton!

**THIRTEEN YEARS AGO,** he changed his persona more often than his pants. Since that time David Bowie has transformed from a Diamond Dog into a diamond geezer, and meeting the press in London last week he came across as the head boy from the Tommy Steele School Of Charm.

His answers to the flood of banal and predictable questions from Fleet Street were punctuated with "love", "pal", "mate" and "chum". He told us everything we knew already. It's great to be back in England, he exercises regularly to keep his looks and he's happy about touring and his new album. Oh yes, and he's had an Aids test, will have another if he changes partners and he wants everyone to wear condoms.

**"If I sell more than three albums I'm happy"**

The album is called *Never Let Me Down*, his old school "chum" Peter Frampton plays guitar on it, and judging by our live preview in the London's Player's Theatre (performing "87 and Cry" and the single "Day In, Day Out"), he's still stuck in the non-creative rut that was so evident on *Tonight*. Frampton comes alive and kills the melodies stone dead with his heavy-handed '70s guitar wailing.

It was probably the smallest audience Bowie or Frampton had faced since their days of sharing a school-hall stage in Bromley back in the early '60s, and the elite press posse audience were blasted to the back of the tiny theatre as the curtain drew back to reveal 1,000-watt PA speakers and half-a-dozen of the highest paid musicians in the world drowning out the sound of the trains that rattled overhead as they left Charing Cross station. The tour will put him back in the distance – it is going under the banner of The Glass Spider Concerts, named after one of the tracks on the LP.

"It's the pivotal song on the album. Glass spiders I see as some kind of mother figure. It's the idea of children who eventually realise their parents are not really something they can depend upon for everything. They are on their own. It's that kind of feeling I want to put across in the show."

What about his relationship with his own offspring?

"We get along famously, we have a wonderful relationship and I'm very proud to have him as my son. I would like to leave it at that on that particular subject, thank you very much."

Before we can delve further into his sibling psyche, the line of questioning is broken by more Fleet Street frivolity. How do you keep going, David? Have you ever thought of quitting?

"I've got no intention of stopping. I'm in that luxurious position where I'm doing something that I absolutely and thoroughly enjoy."

But commercial success has eluded you of late. Like the disappointing sales for *Tonight*.

"You ought to see the figures for *Low*, and we followed that one up. If I sell more than three albums I'm happy.

"As far as *Absolute Beginners* goes, I thought it was a very interesting movie and I enjoyed it a lot. I like the way Julien [Temple] works with the cinema, I think he's got some interesting things to say. I made *The Hunger* with Tony Scott and it wasn't a great success commercially, but then he went on to make *Top Gun*. I think the same thing will happen to Julien."

What about directing yourself?

"I would love to – as often as possible I have collaborated on my videos, but it's kind of a quantum leap to go from four minutes to 90."

Yes, that's something Julien has found out himself. From then on, it's all denials and corrections to previous press reports ("No, I'm not playing Frank Sinatra in a film. No, Mick Jagger and I are not remaking *Some Like It Hot*. No, I never said 'lights, costumes and theatrical sets'"), except for a few words on image. Ziggy Stardust revisited?

"I'm really proud of all that. I think I started something that was really quite interesting and also very amusing. I've never seen it as an image, it's creating characters. Take a good character actor like Robert De Niro; in *Taxi Driver* you know he's not Travis. It is Robert De Niro playing Travis. It's just as simple and naive as that with me." *Terry Staunton*

EBET ROBERTS / GETTY

# “We’ve tamed the beast”

**THE CULT have changed. No longer the “Muppets of goth” (© MM, 1985), their latest album has been recorded with Def Jam’s Rick Rubin. “We’ve had to go back to basics. It’s giving people less and making it sound like you’re giving them a lot more.”**

Going fully *Electric*: The Cult tour their new hard-rock album – (l–r) Ian Astbury, Les Warner and Billy Duffy

ALAMY

## — MELODY MAKER JANUARY 24 —

**THE GHOST OF** Jimi Hendrix walked among us as we sat to one side of this spacious studio in Electric Lady and talked of dead heroes. Interestingly, most of Ian Astbury's greatest heroes are dead, notably Jimi, Janis and John Lennon, while a goodly number of his favourite bands – Zeppelin, AC/DC, The Who, Free and Mountain – have also thrown up their fatalities.

"This room hasn't changed since Hendrix was here," remarked Ian, surveying the wooden floor through curtains of beautifully glossy black hair, free, for a change, from its inhibiting red headband. "Do you notice what this place feels like? It feels really good."

It felt even better when Janis rustled by on an unexpected visit, but she diplomatically kept it brief in order that Jimi might remain centre stage in the conversation.

"I was so excited the first time I came to New York and stood outside the door of this building," Ian continued. "I came in and I thought I'd see masses of Jimi Hendrix stuff in here for me to steal. I was really pissed off 'cos there wasn't anything, but the disappointment went away within an hour. AC/DC did *Back In Black* in here, and Led Zeppelin have recorded here as well. I really don't know what Hendrix ever recorded in here. Probably outtakes. He did own it, though."

"The lounge area for the studio upstairs used to be Hendrix's bedroom," added Billy Duffy, leaning forward beside Ian on the two-seater sofa. "He lived there."

There was, of course, something very tempting about the idea of a wander round Hendrix's bedroom, but unfortunately it was not to be. The clock was calling the shots and the clock was saying quite clearly that it was time to return to the more earthly matters of The Cult, The Cult's new album and The Cult's immediate future as foreseen by the imaginative Ian Astbury.

"You know when you're going to hit somebody over the head with a big stick? They think you've got a little stick. And they say, 'You're not going to do it, are you?' And I say, 'Yes, I am.' Whack. I think that's what it's going to be like for us."

In other words: The Cult have been in Electric Lady studios, New York, recording an album which will shock the knickers off most of their fans. This is a rock album, which is not in itself surprising. The signposts were all there on the *Love* LP, and the group have never made any secret of their supreme regard for the reigning hard rock acts of the late '60s/early '70s as well as more recent happenings like AC/DC and Motörhead. The Cult have always been, by their own definition, a "rock band".

For reasons which will become clear later, producer Rick Rubin, celebrated for his work with the Beastie Boys, Run-DMC and LL Cool J, refused his services to a host of clamouring megastars and chose instead to work with The Cult. Single-handedly, he cured the chaps of their collective blurred vision, set them on the very straight and narrow and finally gave them the album they really always wanted to make but probably never would have.

"Rick came along, scraped all the crap off the top and found the shining, beautiful bits underneath," said Ian, poetically. "He's a Midas for the '80s."

"He knew how we should be approaching things," enthused Billy. "It took someone like Rick to turn round and say to us, 'Stop doing that, it's unnecessary.' He has very little confusion in his mind. He knows what he wants to hear and you either like it or you don't. Whatever arguments or disagreements we have don't last very long. It's a very yes-or-no situation.

"We've had to relearn a lot of things, go back to basics. Now we're using space and dynamics, harnessing power to make big things sound bigger. It's giving people less and making it sound like you're giving them a lot more."

Ian: "One guitar speaks louder than 10. In the old days, there was a better quality of musician around who understood about playing three chords as opposed to 12, who had a better idea of how to communicate a basic thing.

"Led Zeppelin, for example. 'Black Dog' didn't have a guitar on top doing a jazz line and another on top doing an eastern melody and on top of that a tambourine and on top of that, vocal harmonies. So if you've got 12 guitars, why not use them for 12 different songs?

"This album captures the energy of our live concerts, but with fine tuning as well. Anybody who considers themselves to be a rocker in any walk of life should go out and buy a copy when it comes out, and seriously learn, listen how to do it. This is a how-to-do-it record. We've finally tamed the beast.

"It's scary in one way," admitted Billy. "The only thing I worry about at all is that the kids who really like the band might be just a little freaked out by it. It's very raw. It's very naked. It's abrasive. It's not very nice sounding.

"We've talked at length about this record, and I think people will probably go through what we went through, a short period of absolute panic – 'What have they done?' But I think and I hope that the kids that have actually bought our records and supported us from day one and been to all the gigs will get over that initial panic and be able to relax and enjoy it. I don't think anybody who sat down and thought about it would like any band to stay the same."

"**OF THE BANDS** who pre-date our initial bashings, there's only Killing Joke and the Banshees who still exist," said Billy. "Then from the period of '82 to '84, there's only us and The Mission that have come out of it with our careers heading in an up direction. It's a bit sad. It's like there was a whole crop of bands and maybe only five per cent of them are doing anything."

That's the five per cent who are trying to achieve and improve, explore and originate. The diehard gothic survival bands, by contrast, are a pretty useless breed, wailing dismally into an empty future that's only empty because their heads are.

The gothic audience, however, is alive and well and as big as ever, and looking just about the same – an observation which provoked a heated response from Billy Duffy.

"There was one thing I read in the papers to do with The Cult which I didn't like and that was a review of our Brixton Academy gig. The guy was saying he felt sorry for our audience, The Cult audience, 5,000 kids who were having a great time.

"Maybe that was the one night last year those kids really got their rocks off. And this dick feels sorry for their supposedly pathetic lifestyle. That's one of the ugliest things I've ever read. It's wrong to judge people by the way they dress. I don't give a toss how anybody dresses."

"You think about all those kids at home that have got absolutely shit all," demanded Ian.

"That's why people got so into punk. It was an exclusive club. You were identifiable as a punk, you were no longer a number, you were part of a gang, part of a family. They like to feel a part of something."

"A part and apart," interrupted Billy.

"If someone wants to put an upside-down crucifix on, that's fine," rattled on Ian. "We love them all."

Are you saying you would discourage individuality?

"In the fullness of time, they'll find they can still enjoy music and not have to dress in such a uniform way," reasoned Billy, already calmer. "They probably think they're being dead cool, and they probably are where they come from."

"I've seen some gothic kids who look amazing," countered Ian. "They've got it down to a tee, really looking like seriously antisocial human beings. But I think a change will probably happen soon. I think it's happening now. You see girls who have stopped wearing black, now wearing colours. I think the classic Siouxsie Sioux mould is on its way out."

"Siouxsie set the role model for girls eight years ago," said Billy. "They've kept her style ever since, and it's time for people to change. I just think they'll develop in their own way into something else." And the sooner the better.

It's always cheering to meet musicians who have somehow or other remained fans. The Cult are fans in a big way. So much so that they pin posters of their personal heroes on the studio walls for inspiration while recording. So much so

that they leave the fingerprints of those same heroes all over the album, and what's more, admit it.

"We're wearing our influences on our foreheads," said an unapologetic Billy Duffy of the forthcoming LP. "Oh, for sure. No doubt about it. We've consciously tried not to nick, we've made an effort not to lift too many people's riffs, but there are only so many guitar riffs to go round. Chuck Berry made his entire career out of one riff. And that one riff's really good.

"We just do whatever we need to make our songs work. It's not a question of us listening to music and stealing things. It's more the overall feel and sound that we try to get over. Just because we like AC/DC doesn't mean we've nicked half of AC/DC's stuff."

The Cult will readily admit to the influence of the Australians. Also, Lemmy ("for sure, there's a part of Lemmy on the album"), Free ("a great deal"), Zeppelin ("of course") and, to my own satisfaction, Janis Joplin. I can also tell you that the soon-come single, "Love Removal Machine", will sound as direct and as danceable as anything the Stones have done in their livelier moments.

Billy: "Metallica and Anthrax have both told us they play our record all the time when they're on tour. The latest ones were Jason And The Scorchers and The Georgia Satellites. It's very odd. Simple Minds and all those bands say, 'Don't worry about the press, it's really happening, fuck the press, don't let it get you down, don't let it get you scared.'

"But we've seen enough to know that, in Britain, it's very important what the papers say. The only ways to get really heard is by getting your record on Radio 1, getting yourself in the music papers or going through the video outlet, which is very limited. Kids believe the press."

"I remember running out and buying *Melody Maker* when I was 16," said an eminently sensible Ian Astbury. "I ordered it at the newsagents, and if it said a band was good, I'd go out and see them, I'd buy the records. That was my complete bible. I grew up with that. It's the only criticism you're getting. Your friends aren't going to say bad things about you, so when people in the press do, you have a grudging respect for it. But they just want to throw stones at us."

> "We've made an effort not to lift too many people's riffs"

**IT WAS THE** end of 1985 and The Cult were feeling dazed and confused. The album *Love* had been highly acclaimed in America and Europe but not in Britain, even though the tour, their last one, had gone brilliantly. A new album was looming up and the band were in a transition period, set on making a "straight-ahead rock LP" but not entirely sure how to go about it.

Billy: "We decided to keep our feet on the ground and go in with the same guy, Steve Brown, who did *Love*. We went to the Manor and started in on the project with pretty much the same approach we did on the *Love* album. It was just basically: 'Dive in there and whack it onto tape as quickly as possible, make sure it's all played in time, throw more guitars on, we can always sort it out in the mix.'

"Three-quarters of the way through, these bad vibes started rearing themselves. It was like an unspoken thing. It just wasn't right."

"It felt like a better version of *Love*. Like 'Love II'," continued Ian. "We wanted it to sound like our influences and to sound like the way we play live. We thought, 'Let's chop these guitars out, let's get basic drums, guitar, vocals and rhythm guitar.' We went into the mixing stages, but it still didn't work out."

"There was much, much, much too much going on in the tracks," said Billy, picking up the story.

"What we failed to realise in the pre-production stage was that we didn't do enough work on the structure of the songs. We couldn't work out what route to take to get the record sounding the way we wanted it. We couldn't find out where we were going wrong. So we had a real panic. It was frightening. We'd spent a lot of time and money on it.

"We went through a lot of options and the last one, to re-record the whole thing, was never even spoken of. It would've caused too many heart attacks all round.

"We couldn't decide what to do. The penny was beginning to drop that you can't polish a turd. Something was fundamentally wrong with the way we'd recorded the songs."

The Cult had already been in touch with Rick Rubin after hearing some of his work, primarily with the Beastie Boys. They'd sent him a tape and he'd expressed interest in working with them, which surprised everybody, it seems, except for The Cult.

"I wasn't surprised at all, because of the way we'd been talking on the phone," said Ian. "We'd be saying to each other, 'Do you like Led Zeppelin?' and 'Do you like AC/DC?' – 'OK, let's work together'. That was it. The common influences."

"You could lay some heavy Free on him," continued Billy. "It was like a cultural exchange. It's just nice to find somebody your own age, somebody you don't have to explain yourself to. I never really gave any thought to the other, more major artists who wanted to produce them."

"He doesn't have to worry about money anyway," commented Ian. "His film company will keep him in bacon double cheeseburgers for the next 50 years. He's just into making records he'd want to take home and play."

Originally it was agreed that Rubin would remix two or three of the album tracks. Then, around November last year, it was decided he would remix the whole album. The Cult flew out to New York, where it was settled that Rubin would re-record three or maybe four tracks. And finally, the whole of the completed, unsatisfactory album was scrapped and re-recorded in a short few weeks at Electric Lady, with some of the original tracks dropped to make way for new ones (which may or may not include a version of "Born To Be Wild"…).

"We were doing 16 to 18 hour days because the adrenalin was so high," says Ian. "The engineers were really on the ball. It's not 'Excuse me, I'm going to get a cup of tea', it's 'Excuse me, I'm going to work 18 hours a day for the next few weeks'. I think this was all meant to be, in a strange way. If we hadn't made a balls-up of the album, we wouldn't have re-recorded it and we wouldn't have got what we've got now."

One trusts that the record company took the whole thing as philosophically…

"It was like God in His wisdom said, 'Hold on, you're going to New York and go to Electric Lady studios.' The powers that be have decided we're the ones that are going to break the stalemate that's been going on for seven or eight years. We're extremely confident in this album."

**SO IS RICK** Rubin. He proclaims that this is "a classic rock record that will sell for the next 20 years".

He said of The Cult: "I heard some of their new material and it sounded very exciting and different for them. I think they were in a transition period, verging on a rock'n'roll sound and I thought I could help them carry through that rock'n'roll feeling. They probably could have done it themselves, but I thought it would have taken them a couple more albums. This way, they skipped ahead pretty quickly.

"I had them play all the instruments dry, whereas in the past they had a lot of effects. They weren't used to playing tight, specific parts. There were no effects to hide behind. I wanted them to achieve the sound first, without any effects, and then add the effect afterwards. It's like starting at A and trying to get to B. We had a better A.

"I wanted to produce The Cult because of the potential of the material and because they were a young band and the timing was right, I thought, for them. I can be involved in a make-or-break album as opposed to working on, say, another Mick Jagger record. I prefer working with younger people; I'm 23.

"From what I understand, a lot of the best rock'n'roll producers came from a black music background. Mutt Lange, who's worked with Def Leppard and AC/DC was a lover of black music. Rock'n'roll is rooted in the blues, which is black blues – so understanding black music is very important in attacking rock music. There's a feeling of a groove that doesn't often exist in a lot of pop music.

"I'm a fan of rock from a blues background. My favourite bands are AC/DC and Aerosmith and I've recently started listening to Led Zeppelin a lot. This Cult album will put The Cult's name up there with groups like that. You think of rock'n'roll and you think of AC/DC, ZZ Top, Aerosmith and now you'll probably also think of The Cult." *Carol Clerk* ●

# "This is what we do best"

**America, good and bad, profoundly informs the new U2 album, *The Joshua Tree*. Still, Bono is no preacher, he claims. "Eno said, 'Bono has given me enough, but he hasn't given me all he's got.' I've given him more, but there's a lot more to come."**

ANTON CORBIJN

**December 14–16, 1986: along with album designer Steve Averill and photographer Anton Corbijn, U2 go on a three-day trip around the Mojave Desert in California to shoot images for *The Joshua Tree***

## — MELODY MAKER MARCH 14 —

**"ONCE, WE WERE** asked to set up an audience with the Pope. We were told the Pope wants to meet U2. We thought, 'This is a good laugh – he must have heard 'Gloria'. So we got the message and said, 'Fair enough'… I'll meet anyone.

"So I thought, 'Yeah, I'll meet the Pope, impress the relatives.' In one way, I'm attracted to him because he's Polish, and I like Polish people, and he has a tender heart. But on the other hand, he's very conservative and some would say he's put the Catholic church back a few years… So in the end I said, 'OK, we'll meet him privately.' Word came back from the Vatican… 'No press? No publicity? But ees the whole idea!' I said, 'Sorry mate, join the queue with the rest of the punters.'"

Bono needs a shave. It's not a desperate need, but there is something incorrigibly Geldofian about him as he bustles about his business, showing early signs of inelegant wastage. Tossing his ponytail behind him, he grabs a mic and bends forward awkwardly, peering hard at unfamiliar lyrics heaped on the floor in front of him… "*In the town of Springhill, Nova Scotia…*"

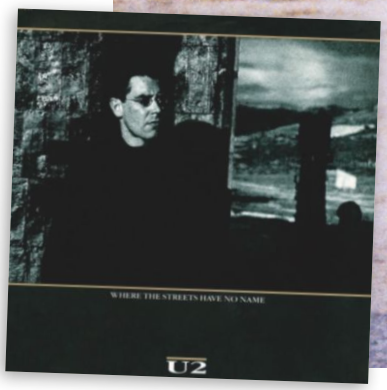
He bounds over, all smiles and pumping handshakes, a kiss for Regine his publicist. "Sorry to keep you waiting… How are you? Very good of you to come over. Thanks for being patient. Can we get you anything? Tea? Coffee? Something stronger?"

A fleet of Filipino handmaidens? The freedom of Dublin? No, nothing, Bono. Just an intro. And so U2 play The Dubliners' "Springhill Mining Disaster", a heartbreaking, deathly song the band are knocking into shape to play on Gay Byrne's *Late Late Show* (which goes out in Ireland at 9pm!) as part of a Dubliners silver jubilee celebration show, also involving the likes of The Pogues, Planxty and The Fureys.

The Edge painstakingly explains how U2 were groomed on Coca-Cola, American television shows and *Top Of The Pops*, and that it wasn't until they left to start touring that they realised they were Irish. "And it wasn't until then we realised how special The Dubliners were."

Bono's back, dazzling us with anecdotes, slipping into a series of impressions for which Phil Cool might find a use. "Ronnie Drew [singer with The Dubliners] came up to Larry in a bar once and said (*perfect Ronnie Drew voice*), 'Are you wid the U2?' Larry said yes, and he said, 'Jeezus… my boy, he loves your band. It would give him such a thrill to say that a member of the U2 bought his old man a pint.' So of course, Larry had to buy him one. That's real class, that is.

"See, there are two sides to The Dubliners' music. One is the Paddy at the bar swigging out of a bottle and then, when it's finished, breaking it over somebody's head. The other side is 'Springhill Mining Disaster', and that's why we're doing that song."




**U2 ARE BACK** in the fray. Their new album, *The Joshua Tree*, leaves the traps this week and the usual wheels of promotion and touring groan into action. Separately, they explain away the album's ideas and motives with a unanimity that is almost uncanny. Have they been rehearsing their lines? Have they been knocking this one around for so long that they've finally come up with a consensus of opinion?

The album's about America, a new-found awareness of its roots in R&B and country nestling in perfect disharmony alongside their old awareness of its political shame in Central America. They sing rendingly of the mothers of the disappeared, carrying a plug for Amnesty International on the sleeve, while deliberately leaving the flaws they all knew remained on "Trip Through Your Wires", an anarchic shambles of a song rooted in 12-bar blues.

No accident. Bono regards it as only the second album they've ever made, that U2 only really started with *The Unforgettable Fire*. Suddenly they wanted to write songs where the lyrics weren't scribbled down between takes. Suddenly Bono wanted to sing properly. Suddenly they wanted to become a real band.

"Have you heard the new album yet?" enquires Bono in the corridor, between further bouts of startling hospitality. "Not bad, is it?" He disappears, chortling.

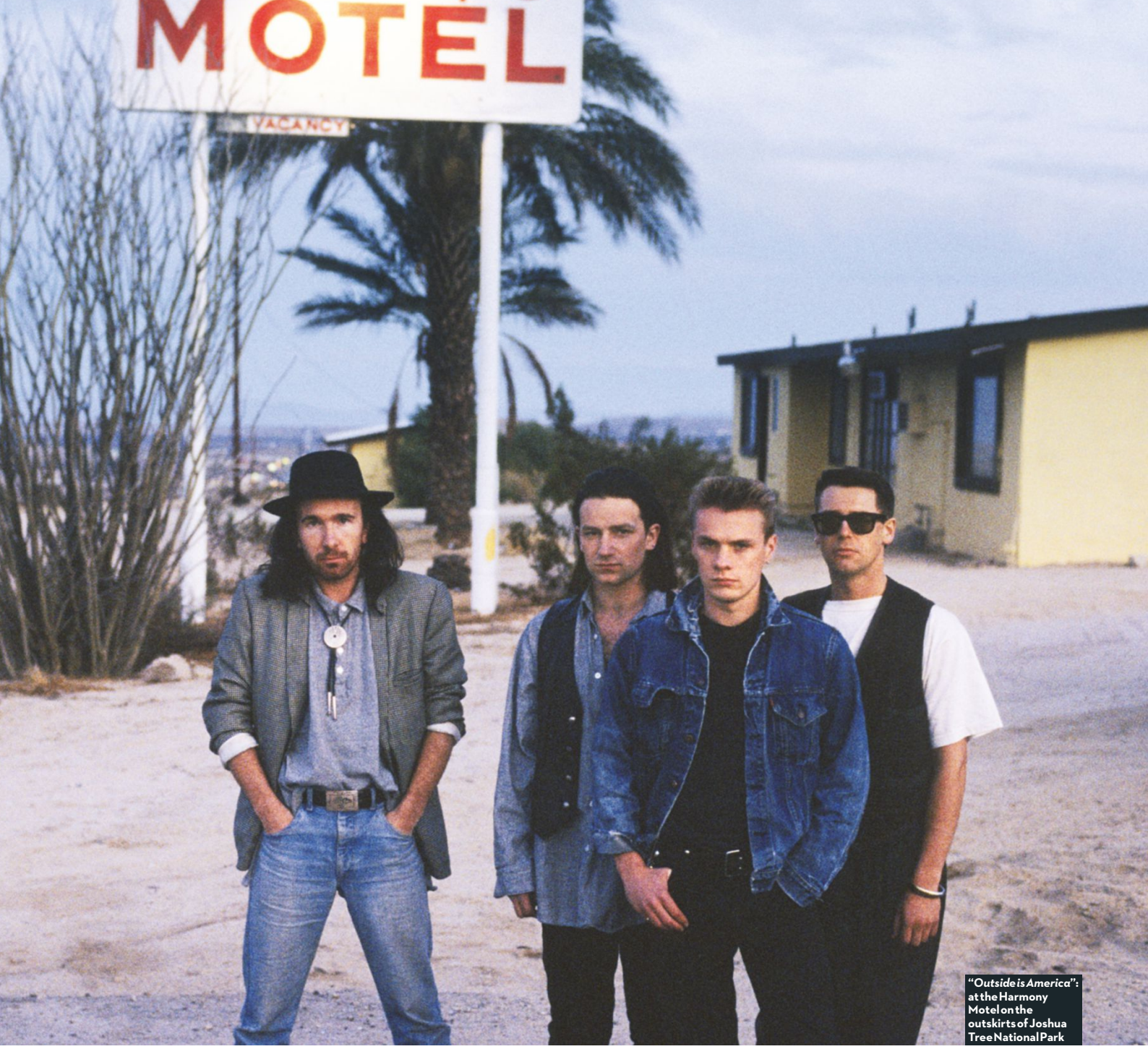
The Edge: "Bono's writing words in a way he hasn't done up until now. He's so much better as a singer now. And we're listening to different things now. We're getting more interested in the classic songwriters, country singers and stuff. It's all relative to our interest in America. It's like we didn't really discover our Irishness until we travelled out of Ireland. And then you go to America and find yourself totally alienated by it.

> "We're getting more interested in the classic songwriters"

"Then, slowly, you realise there are different levels to it. The America of the great R&B and country performers, and in civil rights, people like Martin Luther King and Bobby Kennedy.

"We worked with T-Bone Burnett and Robbie Robertson, and Bono did a session with Keith Richards, people who are hooked up on that. And some of the writers, the new journalism of people like Truman Capote and Norman Mailer, the way they were able to bring you to a place – it's almost cinematic. We tried to do that on the album."

ANTON CORBIJN




**"*Outside is America*": at the Harmony Motel on the outskirts of Joshua Tree National Park**

Bono drags me screaming to the pub round the corner, in the heart of dirty Dublin's docks. We'd been in the management company boardroom, ducking out of the adrenalin firing the atmosphere all around as the heartbeat of the U2 operation hit peak cylinders of professional panic. *The Joshua Tree* readies itself for world domination.

"The molecules in this place," he'd said, "they're just flying around. You may think you won't be affected, you've only just arrived, but you will – I promise you will."

And so we perch on two stools at the bar, the nods and greetings from staff and customers and the odd bit of U2 memorabilia discreetly decorating the walls suggesting the chaps aren't entirely unacquainted with this particular watering hole. Bono swiftly sinks an Irish whiskey in the manner of a real rock'n'roll star and bemoans the lack of good writers in the music press, while I keep half an eye on the progress of Terry Marsh on a TV in the corner. "You like boxing? I've got tickets for the [Marvin] Hagler fight in Las Vegas. I'm fascinated by boxing as a writer, but as a person… I met Muhammad Ali, you know, he's a U2 fan."

Whaaat?

"Honest injun. Dick Gregory brought him to see us. I was completely blown away by it. I just thought, 'This is one of the greatest sportsmen who ever stepped into the spotlight. A man with real class. A man with a real sense of humour."

Was he in a bad way?

"Listen, even when Muhammad Ali's in a bad way, he's still good enough for me. We have some weird fans. We had Bishop Tutu ring us up. In America, I went to one of the anti-apartheid allies, and the tour was having an effect on America – people were joining the anti-apartheid movement, which was a real thrill. The same thing happened with Amnesty International. They doubled their membership after that tour. We didn't actually speak to Bishop Tutu, but we had a call from his daughter. She said, 'My father wants you to know that your tour of America has consequences, and he appreciates the work you're doing for the anti-apartheid movement.'"

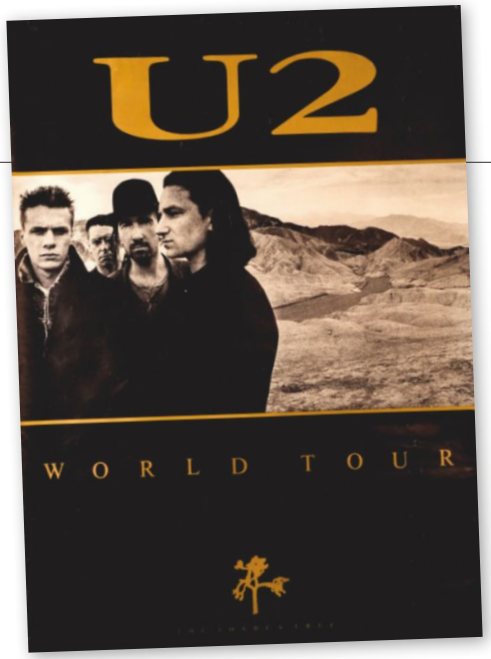
A drunk has collared Larry Mullen at the bar, engaging him in an argument about Self Aid, before telling him the story of his life. U2 were sued at Self Aid, he insists. Larry regards the accusation with equanimity, explaining that, while they didn't agree with all the principles of Self Aid and while it hadn't worked out quite the way any of them had hoped, he had met an unemployed guy in a pub soon afterwards who'd thanked him for appearing on it and said it had given him encouragement.

That conversation alone, explains Larry, was ample justification for them playing the gig, irrespective of all the other shenanigans. They shake hands warmly and the drunk departs, impressed.

Larry Mullen is not only the youngest member of U2, he's also the prettiest. We talk about Bono. Didn't he ever feel the teensiest surge of envy as Bono careered around, grabbing the adoring masses and vigorously dumping them into the palm of his hand?

"No, no, NO!" he says, horrified. "Being a singer is a terrible responsibility. I sometimes get the odd twinge that I wouldn't mind »

The band visit former mining sites and ghost towns such as Bodie along the way: (l–r) Adam Clayton, The Edge, Bono, and Larry Mullen




playing lead guitar, just like a couple of notes, but that's about as near as I would want to get to the front."

I'll have a word with The Edge.

"It looks so frightening being the singer. Especially from where I am. You know, Bono disappears into the audience and you don't know what is happening. You just have to play on and hope for the best, but it's very worrying. I trust his judgement, I really do, he has an instinct for these things… but it doesn't stop you worrying. I don't always understand it, but I trust it."

The Basildon fireman [Terry Marsh] has won the world title and Bono is off on a rant about violence and peace and stuff like that.

"People think the reasons I'm attracted to Martin Luther King or Gandhi or Jesus Christ are that, in some way, I'm a real man of God myself. In truth, the real reason I'm attracted to these peaceful men is I'm the guy with the broken bottle. I grew up that way and I despise violence, I despise the violence in me, and that is why I'm attracted to men who've turned their back on it.

"There was a gig in America once where I threw Larry's drumkit off stage and had a go at the band. And Edge, who is my ideal – he's completely composed – he was so outraged by the violence in me that he gave me a severe dig in the mouth. It was amazing. I've known him all my life, and it was a really good dig in the mouth. It knocked me over. This was on stage, in front of the Talking Heads and The B-52's. I think they all thought it was part of the show.

"You see, for me to sing on stage, the only way I can do it is if I'm really committed to it, and if I sense anything less than complete commitment from the others, then I get very antagonistic towards them, and occasionally this has led to a bit of a fracas. Larry was having a bad night and I was having a bad night and – well, some people come to see U2 and expect to see me in saffron."

You are a bit of an icon to a lot of people.

"I think I must be a very bad icon. People mistake the music for the musician. What's special about U2 is the music, not the musician. I and the others are just ordinary people and our trade is to make music. Somebody else's is to build houses or work in a factory or teach. We're just getting to grips with our trade as songwriters, that's all."

But surely you encourage it? All that flag waving and wading into the audience creating frenzy, don't you feel uneasy about that?

"I do. We went on stage in front of 50,000 people at Milton Keynes and it had been raining all day and the field was like an Irish bog. We went on and I thought, 'How can I live up to this? These people deserve the best concert of their lives, how can we live up to that?' And I couldn't answer it, I can't come to terms with it.

"That feeling has led me to exaggerated gestures on stage, but I've since decided words speak louder than actions. I've got to put the actions behind me. I always resented being on a stage, I always resented that barrier between me and the audience, and this led to that infamous gig in Los Angeles where I ended up falling off the balcony and a riot ensued and people could have got hurt.

"The band took me aside backstage and said, 'Look, you're the singer in a band, you've just got to get up there and sing. People in the audience understand the situation, you don't always have to remind them that U2 aren't stars to be worshipped – they already know that.'"

Do they?

"Oh, they do. But by doing that, it looked like a big star trip when it was exactly the opposite I had in mind. It was something that went back to what I was doing back at the Dandelion Market in Dublin and received a good kicking on that occasion."

But by going into the audience, surely you're bound to incite them?

"Yeah, isn't it funny? I swear to God that was the last thing on my mind. It came out of the exact opposite feeling. We were born out of that punk-rock explosion. I was 16 in 1976 and in a punk band, and this idea of separating the artist from the crowd was the antithesis of what that explosion was all about. I carry that with me and I would end up in the audience as a result. But it was a big mistake."

It won't happen again?

"Nope. Scouts' honour. If the band were here, they'd be groaning now, saying, 'We've heard *that* before.'"

The band confirm they have heard it before. The Edge seems positively bemused by Bono's behaviour on stage. "We used to sit him down before a gig and say, 'Listen, you're not going into the audience tonight, are you?' And he'd say, 'No', and he'd really mean it. But he can't help himself. As a singer, he feels the need to physically get close to people. When he's on stage, he's in a different mental state. Performance for Bono is so total that he comes off stage sometimes and he's totally in space."

Don't you get embarrassed by some of his exploits?

"Embarrassed? No, not embarrassed. Just petrified."

> "In Salvador, troops opened fire above our heads... I felt sick"

**GREG CARROLL WAS** a Maori. U2 met him on one of their excursions to the Antipodes and he became part of the road crew, returning with them to Dublin to become involved in their personal management. One day Bono asked a favour of him and Greg duly went off to collect Bono's motorbike. On the way back he crashed it and was killed.

*The Joshua Tree* is dedicated to Greg Carroll, and one track on the album, "One Tree Hill", was written as a direct response to his funeral. A sort of therapy for the band, perhaps, as Bono can hardly bear to talk about him.

"He was almost flesh and blood with U2. We met him in Auckland, New Zealand. Auckland is a city set around five volcanic mounds and the smallest one is called One Tree Hill because there's a tree at the top of it. We met Greg Carroll there and he worked with us on The Unforgettable Fire Tour.

"He was one of those guys you say he's too good for this world. We haven't, and I don't think we ever will, get over his loss. And he died doing me a favour. I don't know what to say. He further made 1986 the most paradoxical year in our lives. That's why the desert attracted me as an image. That year was really a desert for us. It was a terrible time.

"Death is a real cold shower, and I've had a lot. It's followed me around since I was a kid, and I don't want to see any more of it."

"One Tree Hill" is followed on the album by "Exit", another song of violence and death. Its positioning on the album would indicate conceptual programming, but U2 insist the song is about no specific person and is purposely vague.

The Edge, who had a hand in the lyric, says it's the prime example of their new cinematic approach to constructing songs and was partly inspired by reading Mailer's *The Executioner's Song*. Bono, on the other hand, talks of Flannery O'Connor and black comedies from the Deep South of America.

"It's just a short story really, except I left out a few of the verses because I liked it as a sketch. It's just about a guy who gets an idea into his head. He picks it up off a preacher on the radio or something and goes out and… I haven't quite worked it out yet whether it was a suicide or a murder. The words just came out very quickly on the last day of the record. We had 30 songs for the album and chose 11 of them, but I wanted a song with that sense of violence in it, especially before "Mothers Of The Disappeared".

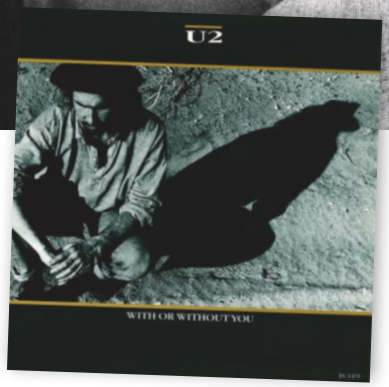
America, America. It dominates the world and thrills and appals U2. Adam Clayton was appalled when, halfway through their first major US tour, he noticed that they'd adopted the first signs of American accents. Panic set in. MTV and American radio was subsequently banned from their ears and an urgent SOS went out for a rescue dispatch of tapes of the John Peel and Dave Fanning shows, lest they become any more contaminated by the bile of American music.

Thus freed from the taint of American media brainwashing, they started to prod beneath the surface a little more. Asked who he is »

ANTON CORBIJN

At Zabriskie Point, east of Death Valley: "I'm interested in a lot of primitive symbolism, almost biblical," says Bono

ANTON CORBIJN




listening to now, Edge will reply, "Hank Williams, Archie Edwards, Willie Dixon and Mel & Kim." And Bono talks wistfully of listening to Keith Richards playing gospel songs on the piano and he, Bono, being introduced to his first John Lee Hooker record at the age of 25.

"It didn't change my life, but it changed my attitude to music. I went home that night and wrote 'Silver And Gold'. I met T-Bone Burnett once in a bar. He said, 'I'm writing a song at the moment, it's called 'Having A Wonderful Time, Wish You Were Her'. I'm in Room Five, would you like to join me?' How can you turn down an invitation like that?"

How indeed?

"So we went off and wrote that song. He'd then hand me the guitar and say, 'Now you play me one of your songs', and I'd look at the guitar, turn it over and play the beat on the back and sing it unaccompanied because U2's music was without root. We, as a group, formed our own sound devoid of any background, because our record collections started in 1976 with Tom Verlaine and Patti Smith and The Clash and The Jam.

"'Silver And Gold' was my desperate attempt – and I wrote it in two hours – to write a song that belonged to a tradition. I was writing it about South Africa, about a man who was at the point of violence, which is something that fascinates me."

Cropped hair, allied to a jaunty pair of pince-nez, gives Adam Clayton the air of an eccentric American college professor. An odd illusion for a man with such an urbane, even aristocratic manner, which itself seems at odds with a man who plays bass with U2 and uses the words "rock'n'roll" at any available pause in the conversation.

There's no specific U2 sound, he insists, because they keep changing it. At one point, they were working on the album and Bono interrupted Edge and said he was beginning to sound like U2. Edge took the point and wiped the slate clean. They wanted to make a live-sounding album because that's what rock'n'roll is all about. They know the album is technically flawed, but that's what rock'n'roll is all about. This album is rootsier because, shucks, that's rock'n'roll. And boy, those old '50s records; half of them are out of tune and the playing's awful, but it sure as hell is rock'n'roll.

One of the first things Bono greets us with, between offers of tea, coffee or perhaps something a little stronger, is a eulogy about Ben E King's "Stand By Me" and its perfect right to be at No 1.

"Adam Clayton… *Adam Clayton*," bellows Bono suddenly. "If it wasn't for Adam Clayton, I wouldn't be in U2. Adam Clayton found Paul McGuinness, our manager. Adam Clayton booked our first gigs. I owe so much to him. He's totally committed to being in U2.

"For a few years, I didn't know whether I wanted to be in a band and U2 didn't know. We thought we might break up. It was after *Boy*, which I thought was a great album. I lost interest. I had less interest in being in U2 and more of an interest in other sides of me, whether I was talking to a Catholic priest in the inner city or a Pentecostal preacher, I was sucking up whatever they had to say. I was interested in that third-dimensional side of me and I thought rock'n'roll was a bit of waste of space.

"I thought, 'OK, U2 were good at being a band, but maybe we could be better at doing other things, like getting involved in the inner city or something.'

"We were teetering on the brink of collapse. Adam was completely heartbroken about this. He was totally disillusioned, because he was more interested in other spirits like whisky or tequila or anything else he could lay his hands on. I'm alright now, I've come to terms with being in a band. I think now that this is what we do best."

**THE NEXT U2** single will be called "With Or Without You", a melodic ballad that sounds like a smoochy love song but, if it is, someone's put acid in the champagne. At the moment they're editing the video. Bono's face appears on the screen, harsh and cold, his hair swept cruelly back to emphasise that this is no standard standard.

Bono is uncharacteristically immodest about the song. He thinks it's brilliant. He thinks it should go to No 1. He thinks the charts need U2 right

now a hell of a lot more than U2 could ever need the charts. He *almost* believes the song has turned him into a half-decent singer.

"I don't think I've been a good singer, but I think I'm getting to be a good one. On *Unforgettable Fire*, I think something broke in my voice and it's continuing to break on *The Joshua Tree*, but there's much, much, much more there. At the end of *Unforgettable Fire*, Eno said, 'Bono has given me enough to get away with it, but he hasn't given me all he's got.' I've given him more on this record, but there's a lot more to come. I know that.

"See, I'm loosening up as a person, about my position in a rock'n'roll band, about U2, but for years I really wasn't sure about who I was or who U2 were or, really, if there was a place for us. People say that U2 are self-righteous, but if ever I pointed a finger I pointed it at myself. I was defensive about U2 and therefore I was on the attack.

"When I hear U2 records, I hear my voice and I hear an uptightness. I don't hear my real voice. A lot of it was to do with writing words on the spot, making them up as I went along. But Chrissie Hynde said to me, 'If you want to sing the way I think you want to sing and the way you can sing, then write words that you believe in.' I'd never done that. I was literally writing the words as I was doing the vocals."

Why?

"I thought writing words was almost old-fashioned. A hippy thing to do. I thought what I was doing in sketching away was… Iggy Pop had done it and he was a bit of a hero. I thought that, as soon as I had a pen in my hand, I was a dangerous man and…"

He suddenly stop dead mid-sentence and I wonder if it's a coronary.

"I hear U2! It is! It is!" He's very excited; they're playing his song. "It's 'Where The Streets Have No Name', it must be on a radio. There. Do you hear it?"

Either he's hallucinating or I am.

"I want to be a singer. I aspire to being a soul singer. My heroes are Van Morrison, Janis Joplin… but on the other hand, they're Scott Walker and Elvis Presley, and trying to work in the two is where I am at the moment. The other interesting thing is that all the people that inspired me when I was growing up all had the same confusions of faith. Bob Dylan, Van Morrison, Patti Smith, Al Green, Marvin Gaye – this has been a real encouragement to me."

He pauses to reflect again on "With Or Without You".

"It's a great single. God almighty, I hope it gets into the Top 10, I really do, it's a classic 45."

Fighting talk, but who cares about his singles when your album is almost guaranteed to go straight into the charts at No 1? And on St Patrick's Day.

Clayton and The Edge still cringe as they recall the last time they were on *Top Of The Pops*. "We were the first group that went on that show and our record went down," says Edge, smiling. "We really felt pretty stupid doing it, though. We were on the same week as Echo And The Bunnymen – that was when Echo were still talking to us – and Mac suggested we swap guitar players. I actually thought it was a pretty funny idea, but somebody said there would be trouble from the unions, so we didn't do it."

But "Pride" was a hit single, and a damn good one.

"It's the highest chart placing we've had, but we're really terrible at producing singles. We're never prepared to work out all that remix stuff and all those other promotional devices, it's never been a priority with us."

"And ultimately," adds Clayton sagely, "I hope people will remember 'Pride' for what it was about rather than the fact that it was a hit. It was important for us to have a single which said something, rather than just make a nice noise on the radio."

Bono is answering criticisms about his use of emotive phrases for easy dramatic effect. *Under A Blood Red Sky, Unforgettable Fire, War*, "Sunday Bloody Sunday", "In God's Country"…

"I guess I'm just an over-the-top kinda guy."

Is that a plea of guilty?

"The Irish are great dramatists. The English hoard words and the Irish spend them. We're loose. Like James Brown – '*I'm a sex machine*' – now that's not subtle. On one level, we're accused of being too subtle and, on another, we're not subtle enough. I'm interested in a certain language. On this record, I'm interested in a lot of primitive symbolism, almost biblical. Some people choose to use red, some people choose turquoise. Some people like lavender. I like *red*.

"During this period, I was influenced by the John Lennon handbook. I had it in my breast pocket… 'Sunday Bloody Sunday'… after all, John Lennon wrote the first one. What upsets me is that when people see U2, they see only 'Sunday Bloody Sunday' and the guy with the white flag. They don't see 'Drowning Man', which was on the same album. There is another side to U2. Sure, we arrived with a placard in our hands – and bold placards – but that's not just what U2's about."

But you shouldn't be surprised when that's what the media pick up on.

"Oh, we deserve everything we get on that one. But *Boy* wasn't like that. Nor was *October*. It was simply one album, *War*, which was a reaction to the new-romantic movement, the cocktail set-mentality, and deliberately we stripped our sound to bare bones and knuckles and three capital letters – WAR – and we put these prime colours in. But we've stood accused since then for that one album. You could say the same thing about John Lennon, he went through a similar sort of period, or Bob Dylan on his earliest work, 'Masters Of War' and all that. It was just a period we went through."

Do you regret it now? "No."

**LAST YEAR, BONO** went to Nicaragua and El Salvador, where he met some of the mothers of the disappeared, inspiring the album's final track. The Amnesty International tour hit San Francisco and Lou Reed took him to Mission Street, where the walls are covered in anti-American slogans and vicious murals. There he met the Chilean artist Rene Castro.

"I was drawn towards Central America through meeting him. At first he didn't pay me much attention, until he discovered the Amnesty connection. Amnesty saved his life. He'd been captured when Allende was killed and they had the military revolution. He was tortured. He had a hole in his chest. They bored a hole in his chest. He was in the stadium with Victor Jara when he had his fingers cut off and then, eventually, was brutally murdered.

"Amnesty International had got him out and people from the Latin American community came to our gigs and Rene Castro sent me some of his paintings and, eventually, I was asked to go to Nicaragua and El Salvador. In Nicaragua it's, well, it's the sexiest revolution I ever saw. Women in khaki uniforms standing on corners and, well, I don't like *anyone* with an Armalite rifle, but they were standing there smoking cigarettes and looking like Miss World.

"And then going to Salvador, the difference in the air was incredible. You could feel the atmosphere of malevolence from the troops. It was awful. I wrote 'Bullet The Blue Sky' out of the fear I felt there, using very primitive imagery. Because Salvador looks like an ordinary city. You see McDonald's, you see children with schoolbooks, you see what looks like a middle-class environment until you go 25 miles out of the city and see the villagers and the peasant farmers.

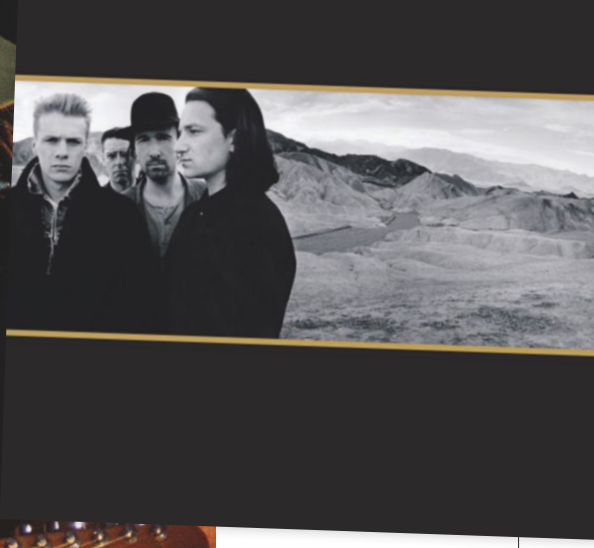
"I was outside on my way to a village, and the village was bombed and it scared the shit out of me. I didn't know which way to run. They were mortaring the village and there were fighters overhead and it was completely… And this little farmer says to me, 'No worry, it's over *there*.' He was going through it every day of his life and he'd learned to live with it, whereas I was there just for a few weeks and I was really concerned with number one at that point. Troops opened fire above our heads while we were there… just flexing their muscles… and I literally felt sick.

"The idea that people at our concerts in America, their tax was paying for these instruments of torture, was something I hadn't quite come to terms with."

He turns to Larry Mullen. "Do you think I should be talking about this? Probably not."

Terry Marsh is world champion. The new album is called *The Joshua Tree*. And they wouldn't tell me why. *Colin Irwin* ●

> "The English hoard words and the Irish spend them. We're loose"



Massive but minimal: The Edge and Bono of U2 at Wembley Stadium, June 12, 1987

ALBUMS REVIEW 1987

## ALBUMS

### U2 The Joshua Tree ISLAND

When I think of U2, I don't think of America, I don't think of stadia, sweat, pumping fists, auxiliary hair. I think of fresh air, fjords, snow, the sky, expanse. Only the small-minded could resent these open spaces, this size; the indie regressives or the soulboys, who both hanker for the grass roots, keep their ears fixed to the ground.

I certainly don't think of Springsteen. Springsteen is a hearth, harking back, bringing nothing new in the way of sound or of meaning, every phrase or gesture cueing our pop memories, binding us tighter as a rock family. U2 belong with pop institutions like Costello and The Smiths, whose existence is at once radical and reactionary. Reactionary because they're trammelled by their audience's sheeplike faith. Radical because they've brought something new to pop. And in U2's case, that's a new sound.

It's a sound, a sense of space and architecture, that wouldn't exist without Television. Tom Verlaine opened up the possibility for rock to retain acceleration and urgency while shedding its aura of masculine rowdyism, its scuffed shabbiness. He invented a kind of austere psychedelia, an abstract attack, a pure aggression with no object beyond exultation in itself. This puritan, post-R&B rock is everywhere – Verlaine gave us Echo, Go-Betweens, REM, Bodines, Meat Puppets, Hurrah! – but no one has made it resound louder and larger in global pop than U2.

U2 are massive but minimal, majestic but free of pomp or flourish. There are no solos, power chords, curlicues even – just a weave of close-chording texture, an exhilarating shimmer. Tracks like "Where The Streets Have No Name" teem, accelerate, become inexorable, a cascade of sapphire and marble. Echo haven't done anything as powerful since "All I Want". U2 bring to the packed, agoraphobic confines of pop something big, something grey. That's their valour, but also their undoing. Their music can never be as selfless as REM or Stars Of Heaven, because Bono is mixed too big, thunderously close. When he embraced that girl from the audience at Live Aid, it was touching.

Listening to this album, crushed against his bosom, deafened by his pounding heart, the intimacy, the concern is quickly intolerable. There are only ever three tracks on every U2 LP you can listen to. The other problem is that all the mystical outreaching impulses in their sound get condensed down into a humanist vision, vested in the charismatic focus of Bono. Driven by the desire to articulate big truths, to wield language large enough to unite us all, U2 are drawn to safe issues, like Amnesty International, Martin Luther King, that reach across divisions to all "decent folk". There's a naive hope that we can transcend politics (but Bono, there are monsters in our midst, in our own hearts), whereas at its best U2's music suggests that we can transcend our flesh and our identities. It's glorious make-believe.

Some say the impulse to "soar above" is a bourgeois delusion, a hygienic aversion to the "truth" of filth. Well, the good thing about being a schizophrenic rock critic is not having to choose – I can be up in the air today, down in the dirt tomorrow. U2 are out of touch, and today at least, I mean that as a compliment.

*Simon Reynolds, MM March 14*

### Simply Red Men And Women WEA

The things we do for love. Simply Red's second album patrols nature's longest Roman road, the eternal straight line of heterosexual intercourse, with the diligence of the AA's keenest recruit. There's little cheer here for those media analysts who would have the band enlarge on the political statement of "Money's Too Tight", defining its name in terms of socialist responsibility. Sexual and emotional policies are the issues under debate on *Men And Women*: its lyrical concerns suggest you'll find Reds circa '87 anywhere but under the bed...

In the little under two years since *Picture Book* was released, Simply Red have grown together to become one of the chart mainstream's most convincing and accomplished bands – recent live performances of that album's material make the recorded originals sound one-dimensional in comparison. So the striking thing about *Men And Women* is how well producer Alex Sadkin captures that new confidence. With the basic six-man band now regularly augmented by vocalist Janette Sewell and saxist Ian Kirkman, Simply Red has a sound as energetic and muscular as any pop band around.

And, of course, it has Mick Hucknall's voice. As a vehicle for a song it's technically impressive, but more importantly emotionally expressive. What determines its strength in practice is the material it is asked to carry, and as writer or co-writer of most of the tracks here, the responsibility falls on Hucknall to exploit his own gift.

His judgement is good, but not infallible. On *Men And Women* he chooses to court the kind of image he has been at pains to dissociate himself from in recent interviews – OK, so self-written material need not necessarily be autobiographical, but there's certainly plenty to titillate upholders of the dog-with-two-dicks school of character appreciation.

Most affecting are those songs that put libido on hold and

PETER STILL / GETTY

wear their heart on their pyjama sleeves instead. "Suffer", one of two tracks written in collaboration with Lamont Dozier and cheekily credited to Hucknall-Dozier-Hucknall, proves the point. "Holding Back The Years" suggested the colour range Mick Hucknall is capable of – here his high register work conjures up an infinite tenderness and vulnerability, which provides a welcome counterpoint to the cocky gait of the first single lift, "The Right Thing".

A reverent but sufficiently personal cover of Bunny Wailer's "Love Fire" gives him similar room to stretch out, but it's on the self-written "Shine" that he relaxes enough to blend in with his musicians and product a true ensemble sound. Punchy and precise, it's the best dance music Simply Red have presented on record so far and successfully scuppers the widely cherished theory that Simply Hucknall would be a more accurate moniker: here the voice is one more element roped in to serve the song, but it's none the less effective for that.

Less winning are the two songs which Hucknall uses as a soapbox to bait journalists and other detractors who would have him agonise in public about the perils of getting rich and famous.

"I Won't Feel Bad" is strong musically, but lines like "*You'll never see me walking down a guilty middle-class street/I'm frequently appalled/By them pretending to be poor men...*" Step out clumsily over the beat and seem a gratuitous expression of sentiments made forcibly in just about every Simply Red interview so far. And council flat references in "Move On Out" sound suspiciously like a calculated attempt to prolong the debate, however legitimate they might be to the song's scenario.

These idiosyncrasies aside, *Men And Women* is a likeable summation of Simply Red's progress over the past two years, and one that justifies the bravura of the rogue male Hucknall. It's probably a safe bet that, live, the band can already blow Sadkin's cleanly recorded studio versions away, so future developments have a strong foundation in the 10 tracks here.

Emotional politics, the politics of dancing... Simply Red's manifesto is strong enough to prove a tactical vote-winner.

*Alan Jackson, NME Mar 14*

Making a stunning re-entry: Prince arriving at the BBC Radio 1 studios, London, April 1, 1987

SINGLES REVIEW 1987

## SINGLES

### Prince Sign O' The Times WEA

There's no one operating anywhere who can contrive a similar atmosphere of excitement, of a definite "event" merely by releasing a record. Prince's genius and understanding of pop's ability to capture the moment, to flood the mainstream with outrageous, subliminal messages is unparalleled by any artist in his position. He clocks all the subcultural signs, the brags and the boasts of the rappers, the new shapes being carved out of old rock, but he keeps a verve and an adventure that will rarely see him usurped.

"Sign O' The Times" is a stunning re-entry after the tomfoolery of his recent celluloid fling. In every way – mood, melody, vision – it is the black downside of "Kiss"'s brilliant, open-ended sensuous flurry. The former was playful and suggestive, "...Times" nails its mood with the same pared-down minimalist funk, but it bubbles to a dark anguished spooky spell of a record; matching Marvin's inner-city sermons to Sly's anguished *...Riot Goin' On* comedown. He hasn't been watching *Dynasty* to get his attitude either; this is a big-chill paranoia Polaroid. Kids of 17 high on crack toting machine guns, rocket ships exploding, news broadcasts filled with death, the old swinging party of "1999" stopped in its tracks by the fear of "*a big disease with a little name*".

He's swapped a lush sensuality for psychological tremors, chiselled his new tight-coiled guitar sound (compare with the axe heroics of "Purple Rain") to a lean, lethal edge. It's intense, scary, claustrophobic, and you can still dance to it! Compared to this, most records just fade into sad insignificance. *NME Mar 7*

### The Go-Betweens Right Here BEGGARS BANQUET

A shotgun wedding between the Bunnymen and Tin Pan Alley which provides the firepower missing from "Head Full Of Steam". The addition of Amanda Brown on violin and vocals makes for a fuller sound as Robert Forster picks up the pieces of his love life: "*Climb upon my pony now you've been thrown/Get back in the saddle and let it be known / That you're made of steel.*" Their best yet. *NME Feb 14*

### Terence Trent D'Arby If You Let Me Stay CBS

Let superlatives pour down: Terry D'Arby has the most exciting soul voice to explode from a hairy chest since... well, a gallery of very respected gentlemen indeed. Sam Cooke's delirious joy via Bobby Womack's grit is but one map reference, and that is no overstatement. The song itself is in the loose-limbed, sexy vein of such mid-'70s dancers as George McRae's "Rock Your Baby", Marvin Gaye's "Gotta Give It Up" or Joe Tex's "Ain't Gonna Bump No More", and should light a big fire under feet and ears everywhere. A Star is Born. *NME Feb 21*

### Communards You Are My World '87 LONDON

Didn't really take off first time around, mainly because the "controversial" lyrics scared off the radio producers. Now Jimmy and Richard are high-profile pop stars with a No 1 behind them and are figureheads of Aids awareness campaigns. Still the best thing they've ever done and destined for the Top 10. About bloody time! *NME Feb 14*

### Camper Van Beethoven Take The Skinheads Bowling ROUGH TRADE

While it's not the magnificent quixotic blend they arrived at on last year's album, this is a must, an endearing cult classic from a fine bunch of inspired Californian crazies. They hit the jangleometer for all it's got, but their gift is to get the chords that matter, offset it with careening fiddle and clever harmonies, and for all their wry nonchalance, there's a warm heart beating at the centre of their music. Besides, the line "*I had a dream last night I want to lick your knees*" will stick with me to the grave, if not beyond. *NME Mar 7*

DAVE HOGAN / GETTY

March 27, 1987: wearing one of his four sets of Lewis Leathers, Julian Cope poses for publicity shots at 36–48 West Street, London WC2

# “My image, is it crass?”

**Leather trousers, banter with Mark E Smith, and even a hit single – never mind “Julian Cope Is Dead”, JULIAN COPE is back on top. So can anything derail this toy-collecting family man? “He pulled out his dick and it had a huge ring through it,” says Cope, “and I just went, ‘WOW!’”**

DAVID CORIO / GETTY

— NME JANUARY 24 —

JULIAN LOVES CARS. The one we’re in now is quite nice.

Our driver eases the rented Mercedes limo through inner-city Paris on a wet Monday morning. The smoke-glass windows keep the snob value in as we gently overtake around the boulevards and avenues.

The leather Julian lounges easily in the rear seat. He too enjoys the ride, but he has another four wheels on his mind. Today he wants to buy a car, but his desire is no ordinary auto. It’s a 1959 Lincoln Premiere, a presidential marque, long and low, a cool machine. The French version has rare wheels – he must have it! But Julian will never drive this beautiful benchmark of Detroit boomtime, for this Lincoln is a Dinky Toy. And this is a serious trip.

We have escaped the traffic, and are doing as the Parisians do – sitting in a cafe. The one we’re in now is quite nice. It’s the Café Costes, a chic rendezvous. Around us, a thousand films are being made for whatever-is-French-for-Channel 4, while Julian and Cally discuss The Car. Cally is Julian’s manager. He too favours the leather look, and they both dig ’60s acid-punk and toy vehicles. Today, Cally will pose as a model dealer and pay a surprise visit to the Paris fanatic who has offered the Lincoln. The pose should cut the price. Julian will hang out here – he dislikes haggling for toys. But what’s so special about this model?

“They did two different sets of wheels, and I haven’t got this set. It sounds really stupid, but you’ll see it. I just hope we get it.” »

They're in Paris expressly to secure The Toy. To underestimate Julian's passion for toy cars is to underestimate his well-documented obsession for the finest rock'n'roll. He even has his own toy firm, Copeco-Callitoy (they import and export for the benefit of their collections) and – at his uncle's house near Tamworth – a sunshine playroom overflowing with his beloved scale models.

"When I go into the toy room it's just completely magical," he glows. "You go through a 60-foot corridor to get to it, and you come out into a Peter Pan land. Yeah, just like *The Lion, The Witch And The Wardrobe*. It's a retreat, I've written a lot of songs in there."

What does your toy car collection mean to you?

"It's special to me. I like toy cars more than I like real cars; it's a perfect miniature, nothing can go wrong, a toy isn't going to rust and fall to pieces.

"When I started collecting them about five years ago, the prices were really low, and I bought most of them then. But there's certain gaps, like the one we're going for today. It's an important toy to me, very brutal!"

We discuss the imminent bullshit potential of any such collecting. Julian knows his limits; he shakes his head as he tells nonfiction stories from the cut-throat world of toy collecting. At this point, Cally departs on the Dinky odyssey. Julian wishes him luck, and stays on the edge of his seat…

He's back in our lives because: "Someone's got to be prepared to get up there and make a cream-faced loon of themselves."

Julian has never been scared to open his mouth so wide that both his motorbike boots could climb in, kickstart his tonsils, and fall out again. But surely we have more than enough room for him, in a pop-time when no one is prepared to peer outside their wallet. Pop music has dug its grave, but thank God there's someone leaping the hole wearing only a turtle shell.

Oh, how the half-hearted and half-interested bleated about "insanity" when the naked Cope peered across the Tamworth swamps, shell-like, on the cover of *Fried*. The public guffawed and the critics pulled out their toolkits and nailed Julian under the shell. But the creature was even then seeing new daylight as he wrote the sleeve note "Namdam am I, I'm a madman". Sorry, irony not welcome here.

"The way I saw the *Fried* sleeve was this mock-turtle gets flopped out, born into this weird skyline. When I get an idea like that it becomes obsessive, you take it *riiight* back, as far as it can go, and sometimes we take it too far. But I thought that sleeve was a brilliant image, hysterically funny. And it was such an anti-Teardrop, anti-world-tour thing, to do that in your own back yard."

**THE TEARDROP WORLD-TOUR** thing brought Julian into my backyard in early 1982. They played twice in Auckland, New Zealand, an absurd add-on to their schedule, but one a couple of us were most grateful for. We reached Auckland, 700 miles north of our own city, and upon arriving at the venue in mid-afternoon were stunned to see Julian sitting in the street-front window being interviewed for TV. After the cameras left, we burst in and chased him up the stairs as he returned to his soundcheck. My distinctly respectful call-sign "Excuse me, Mr Cope" caught his attention as desired, although I was ridiculed for it long afterwards. But he sat with us offering banter and autographs, and we levitated back to the South Island after those excellent Teardrops had evaporated.

Five years later, I hold him just as high, preferring my chosen ones to be spirited in sound and vision, capable of the banana-skin ass-ride occasionally. And how his audience delighted in the hit, the comeback, and seeing him strut his fulsome pop vision once more on that recent tour. If it's war on the bullshit, Copey's in the trenches. He is committed, and his audience return the compliment.

"We're in the age of people dabbling – 'I'm into a little bit of this' – that garbage. It's like when I want to look good, I want to look amazing, like the 'World Shut Your Mouth' 45 sleeve, I just wanted to look totally gorgeous."

And some follow the image to the limit. Like the Japanese girl who, in Tokyo on a Monday, read of the recent tour of the UK and was on the tube out of Heathrow on a Wednesday. Or (and this is very typical) the two guys who landed at Tamworth railway station and spent six hours in search of Chez Cope.

"When people arrive at my house it depresses me when they have been looking for ages. Like the other day when I'd been in for only an hour, for the first time in week, and those two guys arrived."

> "I'm aware the gross sides of me are appealing"

Julian and his good lady Dorian took them in for tea and conversation (leave your acid at the door these days, callers), but the couple are worn out in their roles as – reluctant – matinee idols at home.

"With my little piece of art, it's important that the people who hone in on it can be obsessive about it, 'cos it gives them the chance to go out and do their everyday life. I'm entertaining, but I'm aware the gross sides of me are appealing. I think a lot of people are doing that by proxy if they're into me."

He is astute; it is important to the Cope folk that they can believe in this idea of access; they want to be as close to him as possible, because he is the very rare larger-than, *real* life pop star, blissfully aware of his "dickhead factor" (© J Cope) yet unfazed by it. Then there's the erotic charge of this black-leather wiggy bopper as he straddles, rides, cuddles and swings that absurd giant gear lever of a mic stand (from an idea by Howard Devoto; remodelled by Jim Kerr).

"*I've got a spacehopper baby/But it's strictly one-seater.*" Ride on! When he pauses for breath betwixt songs, reaches for the anecdote, the audience snuggle up to this extra slice of Cope. And when he's straining for the last elusive note, they will him to the pitch-perfect finale, no pins will drop, just like Elvis at the Royalty on the masterful "I Want You".

Hanging on for dear life at the edge of his stage world – as is defined by the swing of that stand thing – Julian smirks at his audience, and it is definitely his crowd. They wear their fandom as a hip badge; many of them are too young to have caught on for *Wilder* but they're back-tracking, and Julian would certainly approve. How many reached *The Stooges* through "The Passenger"? Whereas Julian was once a minor character in those speckled post-punk days, he has now flailed himself clear. Gone are the hesitant, quasi-pastoral plays of "Pure Joy", "Seven Views of Jerusalem", "Colours Fly Away"; Julian is relishing the Second Time Around, he's kicked the habits, and he's rocking out. Be there or be one of those "dabblers".

He had been consigned to the Barrett home – turning vegetables in his mum's front garden – even before the *Fried* sleeve. Julian Cope was at his lowest at the time of the first solo album, he felt like death after The Teardrop Experience – even the songs on *World Shut Your Mouth* were virtually reruns of the group's lost third album. But through the lysergic mists drifted the wondrous, anthemic "Strasbourg", the stark beauty of "Head Hang Low" and "Elegant Chaos"; and on the last one, even zonked to the max, he saw what lay ahead: "*Faces to the glass/I see them televise my death/Oh, and here comes the part/Where I break down and cry.*"

But he cried tough, and pity the parched ears that have not heard the whimsical masterpiece that is *Fried*; "Bill Drummond Said", "Me Singing", "Laughing Boy", "Holy Love", "Sunspots". Hold your head up high, Cope, and put those bloody tabs away. He did. He lived long enough to see the light at the end of Mercury/Phonogram, and got a "domestic scene" blooming, with a house in the country, a doggy, and no-acid health trip. Now, he is nobody's cult.

"I was very pleased that 'World Shut Your Mouth' sold. The psychology of having a hit single is great, but the fact I can sell records is even better. It is very soul-destroying if people aren't aware of it.

"When I think of what I'm competing against, the idea that I am competing is hysterical."

And now the bouncing baby has matured fully into the bouncing bomb, for "Trampolene" is his hardest-rockin' record yet. It continues in the fashion of "WSYM" in severing all links with the character that is "Julian Cope, ex-Teardrops", because it competes in the way of today, not 1981, or 1983. Massive drum sound, guitars piled on high, even the dreaded "remix". This has alienated some, but would they rather he struggle with the baggage of a bygone era, or cut loose for chart-land proper? He has given some ground, this is a sound calculated to sell, but he poked his nose in where he wasn't really wanted, and now they can't get rid of the bugger. And the hundreds of 18-year-olds at his current gigs seem to confirm him as today's thing today. The only "sell-out", in reality, is the sign on the front door.

Bill Drummond, Cope's old manager, recently wrote the song "Julian Cope Is Dead" as a piece of fatherly advice. Subtitled, it reads: get legendary, top yourself! That action may not be necessary even at this late stage. Incredibly, Julian claims he hasn't heard the song – "but it better be good. I'd hate to be immortalised in a crap record."

Drummond is recording a follow-up, "David Swift Is Dead", based on an incident at the Creation Christmas party. In an over-festive attempt to put "party" into the party, I sprayed whipped cream on a paper plate and

flung it at Mr Drummond while he was onstage performing "Julian Cope Is Dead". Regrettably, my good-natured actions were interpreted as direct insult, and I barely escaped with my life. Er, sorry to embarrass you, Bill, no offence intended (I haven't had the nerve to taste the jam you posted here by return).

But of course, there's two in every crowd, and as the whipped cream dripped from the reddening face of the artist, a shocked stranger turned to me and hissed, "What are you doing? Don't you know he made Julian?"

We low-ride in the limo towards a photo session, earlier in the day. Julian keeps cool; that Dinky's playing wonderful tricks with his mind. He does have a real vehicle. He shows us, removing his wallet from a crumpled jacket and handing up a heart-worn Instamatic picture of Dorian and doggy, posing against his VW Karmann-Ghia. Regular guy!

He met Dorian at a Teardrops gig in the Midwest. She was blissing out looking at him. He, likewise. "I looked down and went, 'AWWLLRIIIDE! She looks like my wife.'"

And soon, she was. It was a Greek Orthodox wedding, for her folks; "two '59 Cadillacs, real *Deer Hunter* stuff". Oh, to have that on video… "I wanted to, but Dorian said that'd be really tacky, and I thought, if an American is telling me that something's tacky, it's gotta be bad."

He was a hit with her folks, but they weren't quite what he was expecting: "I felt a bit of a straight when I first went there, her dad used to be a real big speed-freak!"

Cope performs *Trampolene* and the title track from his *Saint Julian* album on *The Tube*, 1987

**WE ARRIVE AT** the Palais Royal, a massive 17th-century ornamental block of city. Julian swings lithely into gear on a succession of sunken pillars in a courtyard that backs onto a gracious avenue of trees and fountains. He moons through umpteen poses for the camera, making like a swan, a duck, and being generally over-helpful. A gate guard is unimpressed, believing that Julian is in fact a *Vogue*-type pouting Adonis, and he demands to see the model's photo permit. We move on, as leather is a dead giveaway in Paris this season…

"The only reason that I wear leather is that I'm a real slob. I've got four sets, all Lewis Leathers. They give me some semblance of order, and the first thing I do every morning is choose one set.

"I got on the train at Tamworth recently, and walked down the back, and this voice went, 'Fookin' 'ell, it's Jeeewwwlian Cope' (*he accentuates, and laughs*). I said, 'Mark Smith! Looking pretty!' It was him, he looks very styled now, doesn't he? He said, 'I'm not pretty', and I said, 'Tell that to Brix!' She had obviously been all around him, perfuming him, and he had ballet shoes on! He looked great. He slagged me off for wearing leather, but I said, 'You can't, I'm the same slob I always was, I've never been styled.'"

He ponders; "What is my image, is it crass?"

Some say. Everyone loves a clown, and he was wearing his reddest nose the time he was fully fried and on all fours, being dragged to a Psychic TV recording session by Stevo of Some Bizzare. Julian was introduced to them as "the weirdest person in the world". He recounts: "Sleazy Christopherson went, 'Oh yeah? Take a look at this then', and he pulled out his dick and it had a huge ring through it, and I just went, 'WOW!' I was down there on the floor inches from it, just freaked out!"

Back in the cafe, he tells the story with wonder, as if it was some other loony. He's packed away the funny face now, for the most part, because no one loves an old joke and he's seen that. Even the exclamations are a little less frequent in '86. *And* he stays in his seat when reeling off his playlist!

"I liked 'Word Up' a lot, I'm listening to the first Sly LP, The Seeds, of course, and Buckley again. We're doing a Buckley song called 'Pleasant Street', and combining it with Funkadelic's 'I'll Stay', it's really beautiful."

He's working on another strange brew, with Trouble Funk, whose main man James Avery remixed "World Shut Your Mouth". He met them through Island, his label, and was grooving at one of their autumn shows in London, offering the passing comment, "Yeah, they're really relentless!" His alliance with them was a surprise only to outsiders.

"You talk to those guys and they say, 'We love that white guitar sound' [which is why they worked on "WSYM"], and I'm sayin', 'I love that *dirty* black sound! I love the way they've got so much control.'"

Both parties are "into" Trouble Funk playing on "Planet Ride" on the new album, *Saint Julian*. Can't wait. Which reminds me, what's with the non-stop album delays?

"We started it and the songs were really wordy and themey. They honed it down and made the new songs simpler, so all those I'd recorded sounded self-important. I don't want there to be any excess, I don't want any fat on this album. I used to think that if something sounds good over four minutes, make it six. But now it's 2.40."

## Drug alert!

**DRUGS! JULIAN COPE!** Lots to talk about!

"I don't take them. I mean, I skin up, but I don't count dope as drugs. I don't drink very much. If anyone comes in with 'Acid For Julian', I give it to Joss. Joss is off his tree."

Joss is his younger brother. And he's a dead ringer. World, keep it shut.

And if you had a son, and he started stopping by the chemist?

"I'd kill him."

Ninety minutes after leaving, Cally returns to the Café Costes. He climbs the stark, marble stairs to the balcony and approaches our table. Julian's eyes light up.

"Did you get it?"

Cally smiles.

"AWWWLRIIIIDE!!!!!"

Cally slowly opens his bag, teasing the excited one…

"Silver wheels, two rings…"

(We could interrupt, and tell how Julian was sent a massive Mercedes model by post from a Japanese fan, or how he took a 1955 Buick Roadmaster Dinky as royalties for his Rabbi Joseph Gordan "bootleg" 45).

Cally hands a small block of tissue to Julian, who unwraps it with pure joy in his eyes. The original box is revealed, and within it, the 1959 Lincoln Premiere Dinky slips and slides to its new owner's caresses…

Trumpets Cally, "I made out there were chips on the wings, but they're not chips, they're paint splatters!"

They whoop and holler in delight! And Julian pulls the toy from its box…

"AAAWWWLLLRRRRIIIDDDEEE!!!" He holds his prize aloft.

It would be an insignificant sight to the non-collector. Rather drab even, but what do I know? Cally reveals the price – 575 francs (about £60). He enthuses, "It's absolutely mint, brilliant. You should have seen his face when I turned up, he never expected us to."

Julian: "What a period piece!"

They bask in the glow of their success. The 1959 Lincoln Premiere now sits in the sunshine playroom, and Julian Cope starts 1987 with his fullest house in years. I love you, you big dummy. *David Swift* •

REX FEATURES

# "Small talk, bribes, the whole number"

**After a worrying few months – crowd violence, the tabloid press, heroin – THE SMITHS are looking forward again. But does signing to EMI mean selling out? "Morrissey and I wouldn't be branded the villains of the piece unless there was a damn good reason," says Johnny Marr.**

— NME FEBRUARY 14 —

**IN THE RESTROOM** of Tony Visconti's studio beneath the pavements of Soho, Johnny Marr ignores the veggieburger in favour of the trifle, opens a can of lager and settles himself into a settee. A magazine lying open beside him confirms that "Shoplifters Of The World Unite" has crashed into the Top 10, and through the wall behind him comes the faint sound of laughter – Morrissey, Mike Joyce, Andy Rourke and Stephen Street – and the strains of their next single, mixed without bother this very afternoon…

These are happy Smiths, Smiths dreamily ironing their frock in readiness for their arranged marriage to EMI Records. And these are Smiths still catching their breath, having survived 12 months that would've tested the resolve of an Iranian commando.

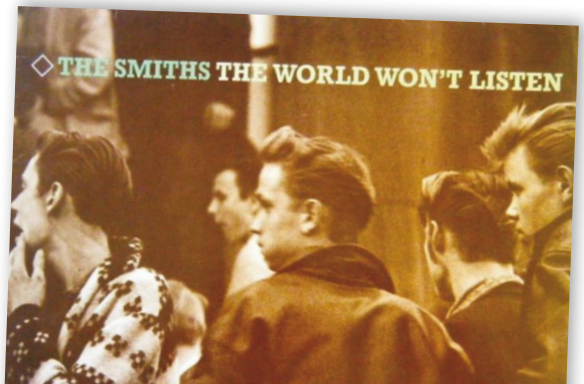
In that year, before they reached their current oasis of content, they were trapped in a seemingly endless jungle of controversy, accusation, overwork and violence. Above the familiar howls of the band's usual critics came new voices, and new words – "traitors", "sell-out", "rockist". And before the dark days ended, one Smith had booked himself an Awayday to oblivion…

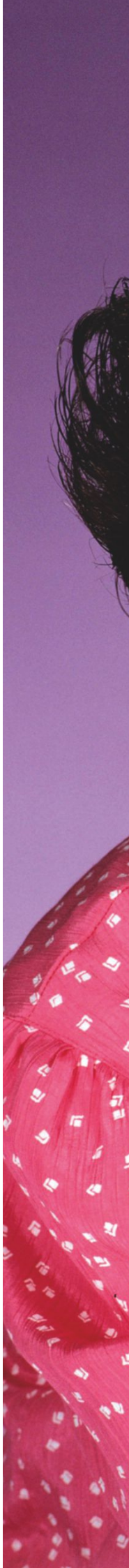
For Johnny Marr, the passing of a couple of months, and the stabilisation of The Smiths' lineup, have allowed him to come to terms with these events. The changes in him, he admits, go beyond his new Elvis haircut.

"We'd all become *too* committed to the band. I was a Smith every second of every waking hour and it was doing me no good. It isn't easy to change, though, because my personal life is so closely wrapped up with the band; Morrissey's my best friend.

"I'm consciously spending more time with Angie, my wife, but she's deeply involved with the band too. But things did have to change. With me it was a matter of saving myself…"

The painful knowledge that things were, for the first time, badly out of hand and that changes (including the endlessly »



EUGENE ADEBARI / REX FEATURES

"We'd all become too committed to the band": Morrissey and Johnny Marr in 1987

threatened severance from Rough Trade's apron strings) would have to be made, hit The Smiths during last year's seemingly triumphal tour of America. Frustration had set in with the realisation that their obvious and growing popularity in the USA remained stubbornly unreflected in the charts. In LA, for instance, they sold out successive nights in an 8,000-seater which, the previous week, A-Ha had barely half-filled – but A-Ha have had a Stateside No 1, and a Top 20 album…

Morale wasn't helped either when MTV showed up. Astounded by the sight of this limey band without a proper record deal selling out huge halls, they dispatched a reporting team to jet-hop from one venue to the next. The Smiths would arrive hours after them. In their van.

"And later," Johnny rolls his eyes, "it got worse and worse. Organisationally, we had so many people pulling and pushing at us; the pressure built up unbelievably. The only way to deal with it, to motivate yourself to go out and be 'big' in front of 10 or 15 thousand people, was to get completely plastered. I found myself doing a bottle of Remy Martin each evening. And after 25 nights of that…

"'Worse for wear' wasn't the half of it; I was extremely ill. By the time the tour actually finished it was all getting a little bit… dangerous. I was just drinking more than I could handle. It was then that I really began to resent, y'know, the thing with the label, the press, all of it. When it starts having a damaging effect on your health, it's all gone too far…"

And how did Morrissey, used to having everything under fingertip control, to being the centre of attention, cope with all this?

"I don't know whether he really did come to terms with it, or what. It's so much more difficult for him anyway; at the end of the day I've got someone I love, someone with whom I can be just totally myself and lock the world out. But Morrissey…"

The Smiths returned to their native fog convinced that a long-promised day could be put off no longer; it was time to talk numbered Swiss bank accounts with the majors.

> "At the end of the day I've got someone I love, but Morrissey…"

"**EVERY SINGLE LABEL** came to see us. It was small talk, bribes, the whole number. I really enjoyed it. The decision to join EMI was only made after massive consideration. We listened carefully to each offer, though I always thought EMI would be the one. They're an institution in the English music scene, which is very in keeping with The Smiths."

Johnny Marr was, and is, delighted with his betrothal to EMI. To some of their more ardent admirers, though, they might just as well have announced that their next single featured backing vocals by the South African SPG!

"The fanatics," begins a weary pop star "were, and still are, genuinely upset about our leaving Rough Trade. I'd have thought they'd be more concerned with a record's grooves than its label, but…

"And surely it's obvious that Morrissey and I wouldn't have put ourselves into a position where we'd inevitably be branded the villains of the piece, where we'd be presented as a pair of commercially opportunistic charlatans, unless there was a damn good reason for doing so…"

Like, shall we say, the million quid EMI are supposed to have bunged yourself and Morrissey to be getting on with?

"That figure is just people making assumptions, and as it happens, neither Morrissey nor myself has yet seen a penny. But I'm not going to get defensive about it – why should I? Obviously the money's part of the reason we signed…"

There's an unworthy suspicion abroad that EMI, having gone to the bother of opening their piggy bank, might not be quite as tolerant of The Smiths' lovingly attended collection of eccentricities as were Rough Trade, may not be as readily galvanised by Morrissey's iron whim, and may, when the subject is broached, think that Artistic Control is the name of their new dance signing.

"That's all dealt with. 'Artistic Control' – down in writing. In any case, EMI realise how desperately they need a good pop group, a great pop group, and that we were successful off our own bat; they won't want to change us…

"That's why the labels were queueing up – they know full well they'd be getting a ready-made, fully self-contained unit, a self-sufficient success…"

If the Curse Of EMI had provided a reliable stream of Smiths-baiting material, the release of their "Panic" single threatened a flood. Morrissey is no innocent, and he'd make the Olympic shit-stirring squad any day, but even he must have been taken aback by the shockwave of anger unleashed by his general invitation to "*burn down the disco*" and "*hang the blessed DJ*"…

Back to the old house: The Smiths in 1987 – (l-r) Andy Rourke, Johnny Marr, Morrissey and Mike Joyce

ANDRE CSILLAG / REX FEATURES

In some places, these pages included, the song was interpreted as an attack on black music. But that was mild compared to a piece in another music weekly.

The furore is still vivid in Johnny Marr's mind. "I'm glad this came up, it's important. To those who took offence at the '*burn down the disco*' line I'd say – please show me the black members of New Order! For me, personally, New Order make great disco music, but there's no black people in the group. The point I'm making is that you can't just interchange the words 'black' and 'disco', or the phrases 'black music' and 'disco music'. It makes no earthly sense."

What did the band make of the accusations published, irony buffs, in Britain's most sexist music paper?

"I'll answer that," he begins grimly, "provided you note the fact that I'm not ranting, that I'm thinking carefully before I speak.

"Right then: next time we come across that creep, he's plastered. We're not in the habit of issuing personal threats, but that was such a vicious slur-job that we'll kick the shit out of him. Violence is disgusting, but racism's worse and we don't deal with it.

"'Panic' came about at the time of Chernobyl. Morrissey and myself were listening to a *Newsbeat* radio report about it. The story about this shocking disaster comes to an end and then, immediately, we're off into Wham!'s 'I'm Your Man'. I remember actually saying, 'What the fuck has this got to do with peoples' lives?' We hear about Chernobyl, then, seconds later, we're expected to be jumping around to 'I'm Your Man'.

"And so – '*hang the blessed DJ*'. I think it was a great lyric, important and applicable to anyone who lives in England. I mean, even the most ardent disco fan wouldn't want to be subjected to that stuff, would they?"

> "Andy's fine now – I guess something positive has come out of it"

**AS LAST AUTUMN** turned into this winter, Morrissey and Johnny Marr sat in the snug of the Salford Lads Club, supping the EMI millions and passing the time by trying to think of possible misfortunes that hadn't befallen them in the previous few months. After three hours they'd come up with two – "Rotten Live Reviews" and "Crowd Violence". Within days, their recent UK tour had been set up to rectify the oversights.

Bad reviews were child's play to obtain, and illustrated the slightly crazy side of the habitual lovey-dovey between The Smiths and their devotees. The band, by the addition of second guitarist Craig Gannon, slightly, erm, beefed up their usual sound. Their adoring audience responded with a display of mass petulance.

They tutted, they blanched, they swooned in the aisles and they filed out of halls like mustard-gas victims. Then they stamped their feet (and typed keys) in protest at the heretical "rocking out".

This, you see, was the first recorded outbreak of cultural vigilantism! They'll guard their sacred Smiths-sound from all potential corruptors, including its original creators. And Johnny Marr – identified, rightly or wrongly, as having rockist leanings – is subjected to that particularly intense scrutiny normally reserved for parents suspected of incest.

The tour's second chunk of innovatory audience participation was altogether more serious, although, according to Johnny Marr, "the truth was much less newsworthy than what eventually got into print.

"It started at Newport, where Morrissey, through nothing more sinister than overenthusiasm, got dragged into the crowd. He was shaken, a bit concussed, and had a bump the size of an egg on the side of his head. There was no way he could have carried on. That all happened about three-quarters of the way through the set, with maybe four songs left to go. The following day, though, *The Sun* reports that in the middle of the 'first song', at the point where Morrissey holds up the 'Queen Is Dead' banner, he was attacked by outraged 'Royalists'!

"The next date, of course, was always going to be trouble. A certain element in our audience who are, basically, thick responded to what they'd read over their morning cornflakes. I didn't see what happened to Morrissey; just turned around and he was gone. But I caught a glimpse of our monitor guy; he had blood all over his arms. Believe me, I was pretty scared; I finished the song and got off. The whole incident was created by the gutter press, but the fact that a Smiths gig could be so ugly left me incredibly depressed."

The incident at Newcastle, then, where Morrissey had to seek shelter from a storm of gob, was minor by comparison?

"Well, yes and no. We just hate all that shit, a minority ruining the show for the rest, the cool ones. I don't mean this in any patronising, pop-starry way, but our audience is incredibly important to us. I look out from the stage and I see a mass of people, mostly guys, who look absolutely incredible, certainly more interesting than the types you get at gigs by The Communards or most mid-'80s groups. We're impressed to hell with our audience."

**WITHIN 10 MINUTES** of the tour's final curtain, the nun-eating rock-monster five-piece edition of The Smiths was, with the departure of Craig Gannon, back to the original foursome. Gannon's original introduction to the band, from out of nowhere, had precipitated speculation of rosette-winning intensity. Earlier, Johnny Marr had repeated The Smiths' party line that Gannon was recruited because Andy Rourke had been "unwell".

This is loyal, but not entirely frank. Bassist Rourke had indeed been "unwell", but we're not talking head cold here. Rourke's health problems were rooted in his increasing involvement with heroin.

"Yeah," Marr nods, "that's true…"

The Smiths' legion of detractors will no doubt celebrate this sad little moment, use it to besmirch, by association, Morrissey's whiter-than-white stance. Inadequates love a victory, however small.

Did Rourke have to go (for what proved to be only a few weeks) because he couldn't fulfil his obligations, or because Johnny Marr, or Morrissey, couldn't, ahem, handle it?

"The issue never came up in that form, but we personally were all devastated by it. Andy and I have been friends since we were 13 or 14. He means a great deal to me. It's heartbreaking to see someone you care about just self-destruct."

And a smackhead, however familiar, hardly suits The Smiths' public profile…

"That's undeniable, sure, but to give him credit, Andy was intensely aware of that. In fact, he was persecuting himself about that too, so the whole thing was getting quite badly complex…

"Andy's fine now and I guess something positive has come out of it, particularly in relation to that 'Morrissey, Marr and the session guys' shit. We found we really missed him, and he discovered just how important he is…"

No, it's not like the old days any more. At 23 (which used to be rock's compulsory retirement age, though now people are allowed to work till they're as old as Sigue Sigue Sputnik), Johnny Marr is in clover. "Shoplifters…" is going to be The Smiths' biggest hit, America beckons, and the deal with EMI means that he can spend the rest of his life hanging out in recording studios. That, to him, translates roughly as Christmas every day!

Most of his social time, too, is spent in the company of musicians, and he's just started to spread tentative wings beyond the confines of The Smiths. He played on Bragg's *Taxman…* last year and is involved now, "in a lowest-possible-profile sort of way", in upcoming projects with Bobby Womack, ACR's Donald Johnson and some old north country busking hermit he's discovered named Bryan Ferry.

But for now, I reckon, he should concentrate on The Smiths, and the upstarts who'll be looking to unperch them.

"Yeah? Like who?"

Like… (load Superstar Wind-up Device)… Like… (Aim)… Like… (Fire!) The Housemartins!

"The Housemartins?!! [Gottim] The Housemartins??? I couldn't acknowledge them as the competition without a smile on my face. And if they really are our closest rivals, it's no wonder I'm so confident about The Smiths! The Housemartins! 'Happy Hour' was a complete rip-off of 'I Want The One I Can't Have', and they've nicked others, too…"

And then there's Raymonde…

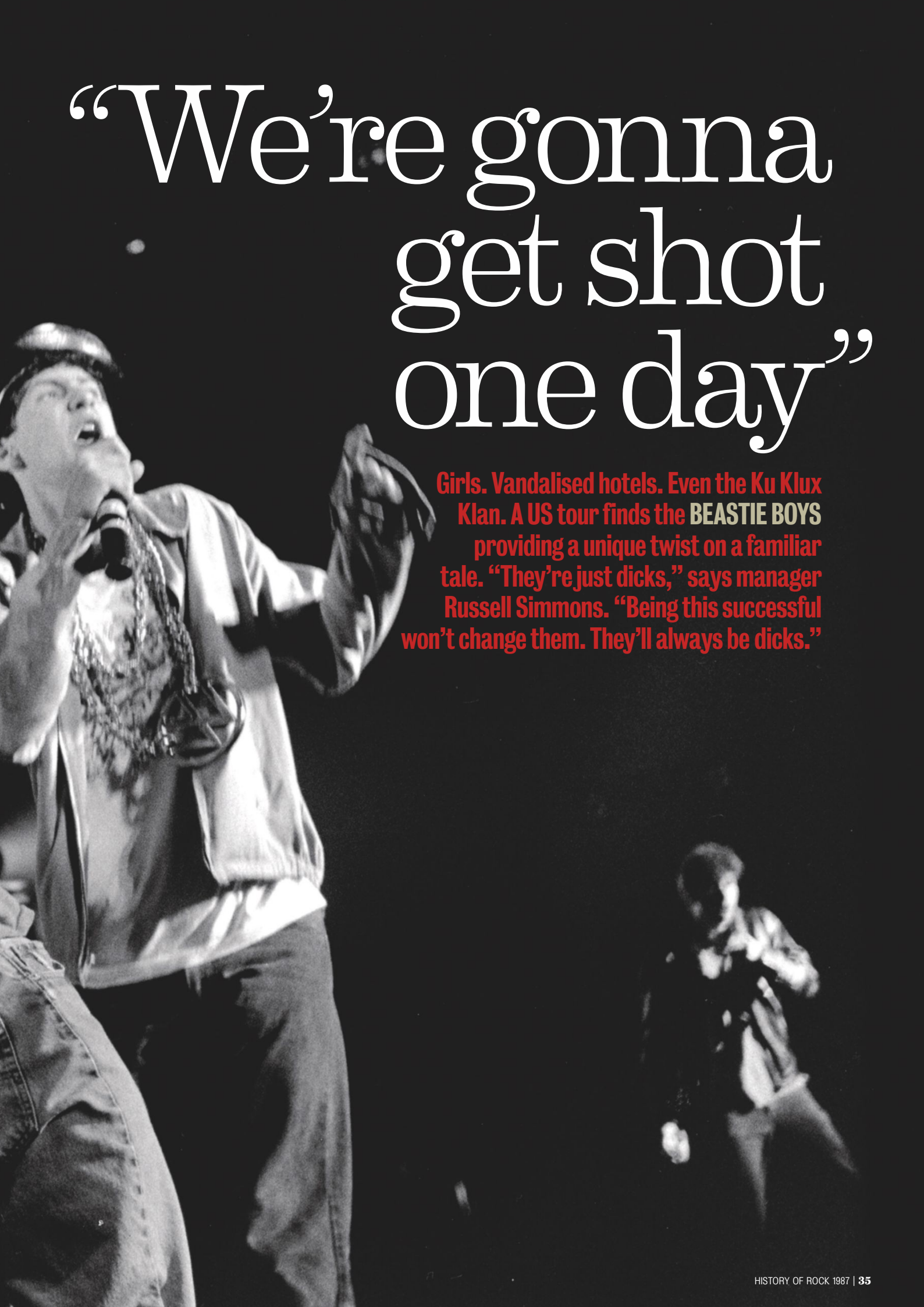
Interview terminates. *Danny Kelly* •

BRIAN RASIC / GETTY

May 28, 1987: the Beastie Boys at Brixton Academy in South London – (l–r) Ad-Rock, Mike D and MCA

# “We’re gonna get shot one day”

**Girls. Vandalised hotels. Even the Ku Klux Klan. A US tour finds the BEASTIE BOYS providing a unique twist on a familiar tale. “They’re just dicks,” says manager Russell Simmons. “Being this successful won’t change them. They’ll always be dicks.”**



## — MELODY MAKER MARCH 21 —

"**YO COLUMBUS, LET'S** see some tits!"

And so it began.

In Georgia, home of hot Tabasco sauce and even hotter apple pie.

Imagine the Beastie Boys – just for the (raising) hell of it. Imagine the tranquil, conservative buckle of the Bible Belt – just for the (burning) hell of it. Imagine two hells colliding head-on.

The Beastie Boys stopped imagining and started playing the starring role in their own fantasy – a dream with more phallus than fallacy as apple pie was smeared across the face of the Southern states.

The chaos cauldron almost boiled over when the band arrived at the hotel – the very same hotel that was holding the Annual Miss Georgia Beauty Queen Competition somewhere – Beauty And The Beasties.

Anything could have happened. Almost everything did.

The band leave the hotel for the venue carrying the only two books they own – *Hammer Of The Gods*, the graphic tour of Led Zeppelin's nefarious acts of indulgence, and *Extended Sexual Orgasm*, a literary delay spray. The Beasties intend to outlive and outlast each page of each book until they either die or hit the index. At the moment, the bookmarks are sandwiched between pages 23 and 24. Meanwhile back at the gig…

On stage: a go-go cage, the giant six-pack of Budweiser where DJ Hurricane sniffs and scratches, and a plethora of empty cans thrown on by the roadies during the show. Also on show – 163 nipples, two people breast-dancing (!), 39 people headbanging, 52 limbs slam-dancing, and an entire arena being pulverised by a harrowing onslaught of metal, mania and mayhem.

By the time the band bulldozed their way through "No Sleep Till Brooklyn", a few officers of the law were also on show. As "Brass Monkey" and "Girls" toppled the Southern criss-cross, the police ranks swelled and edged closer to the stage. With all that blue, it became clear that something was afoot-and-mouth.

Too late to extract that Adidas from that molar now. The trio entered the limelight again for their encore, "Fight For Your Right" – the one where the giant 10-foot cock erupts from the stage. Ad-Rock and Mike D shower the audience with ale while Adam Yauch (MCA) pours beer over some naked nubile's breasts and the crowd foam at the mouth. That was it. The noise was so devastating, no one heard the camel's back break. Snap. Halfway through the third chorus the road crew tackled the trashcan kids, hurling them toward the discreet side exit where a revved car was waiting to accelerate the band away from jail. The police raced to block their impromptu departure, but they were too late.

"What you trying to arrest the band for, man?" an agitated Russell Simmons (the manager) asked a nearby sergeant.

"This is Georgia. We don't need a reason."

The police started milling around the backstage area searching for anyone with gold chains or baseball caps. Time to change the celluloid stage directions.

Take Three. Exit one photographer and one journalist to the relative sanctuary of the hotel. Peace, quiet, and room service.

The Beastie Boys had other ideas. There were still all those Miss Apple Pies to terrify. A score of Southern Beastie Belles had yet other ideas. There were still those horrendous B-boys to terrify. Must be something in the water. "Can I-all come up to yaw rooem?"

"Yo."

Take Four and take four more.

**THE BEASTIE BOYS** were the name on everyone's forked tongues following their obtrusive appearance on TV during the American Grammy Awards two days earlier. The band that put the "c" into rap and the "s" into punk arrived on the nation's screens swearing at the audience, insulting the pop nominees, drowning out the scheduled music with their Third World briefcase and falling over one another trying to do handstands. With a predictably unpredictable performance, they instantly became Public Enema No 1.

"The rules were that you had to wear a tuxedo," says Yauch, scratching his stubble. "Ours were at the cleaners, so we jumped around and grabbed our dicks a lot and laughed a lot."

"We got more press out of it than any of the winners," Mike D gloats. "When you're there meeting all these legends you almost don't want to diss [trans: slag off] anybody. But then we thought, 'What the hell. I hate Barbra Streisand more than anyone in the world!'"

Robert Palmer was the lucky winner of the award for Best Male Vocalist, but for the first time in living memory, a winner stayed rooted to his chair

VINNIE ZUFFANTE / GETTY

May 11, 1987: Beastie Boys and Run-DMC announce their Together Forever Tour on the roof of B Smith's Restaurant in midtown Manhattan

looking anxious rather than elated. He just didn't want to collect his glittering prize from the rabid announcers. I wonder why?

"I think he was scared like shit."

Thank you, Mike.

MCA: "Backstage there were all these Mafia-type promoters offering us blow, but we told them to fuck off and laughed at them, you know. We don't do that shit any more. Then Billy Idol walked in, so we said, 'Yo, what's happening?' and he just turned around and said, 'My album's No 7 in the charts.' Can you believe it! He didn't even say hello. He left because we were laughing so hard at him. Then the organisers asked us to leave. What a prick!"

The Beasties are laughing all the way to the (next) bank. Without warning, without any promotion, and without a care in the world, their album *Licensed To Ill* is No 1 in America. No one could believe it, least of all the band.

"The cool thing about being No 1 is that no one else is No 1," explains Mike "call me Aristotle" Diamond. "So *everyone* has to sit on your dick. At once. It's so cold!"

> "We jumped around and grabbed our dicks a lot and laughed a lot"

Adam Horovitz (Ad-Rock) starts grinning: "The guys at The Grammies all thanked us for coming, whereas a month before they'd have called the police. The thing is, it was obvious we weren't going to suddenly open bottles of champagne when we reached No 1, because we never worked to get there. We never made the album in order to do it. It just happened. We were breaking bottles of champagne five years ago."

Simmons puts it more succinctly: "They're just dicks. Being this successful won't change them. They'll always be dicks."

"But dicks that suddenly everyone has to respect," says Mike, stepping out of his toga. "All those assholes that want to throw you out of the back door now have to find us the best table in the house. There are still more people who hate us than are into us, but who cares? It's the fun that counts."

Bring on Cecil B De Mille.

One hundred and fifty million viewers (dressed in white-belt checked pants, and speaking in unison): "They can't play, they can't sing, they can't write, they can't act, they're just shit."

The Beastie Boys: "We're just def."

The Verdict: the Beastie Boys are happening because 150 million people can tell them that they're shit and yet they still believe they're def.

From New York nerds to household names – just like on TV. No, exactly like TV. No, the Beastie Boys *are* TV – so fantastic their reality *is* TV, and here in the '80s TV *is* reality. Their tour even has commercial breaks…

Ad-Rock: "I'm hungry. Let's stop at a 7-11 at the next town. No, look, there goes a Wendy's!"

And now, back to the movie: a splintering of *Porky's Revenge* and *Nightmare On St Elmo's Street*. The B-boys are every high school kid's illusion come true – a jerk turned rich celebrity watching the bully eat his heart out and swallowing hard.

Mike D: "People think because we act like jerks we couldn't possibly do anything creative. What they don't know is that we get paid a lot of money for acting the way they do."

And even more dollar signs for doing the way they act. Not one of the hotel walls that are lined with guests and tinsel crowns waiting to get autographs (and waiting to see if the Beasties really are as bad as the papers say) believe that the gleesome threesome all play several instruments, all wrote and all produced all of their album. Not even the wallpaper cares. The trio, however, don't disappoint, harassing the cabbage-patch contestants, signing their names, and eating a hamburger simultaneously. Multi-talented.

Gerald Ford couldn't even walk and chew gum at the same time, and he became president. Like they say – in America, anything is possible.

A clean-cut teenager approaches the table, asks the band politely if they're OK, before pulling out a wedge of leaflets from his jacket pocket and pointing a brimstone index finger.

"God have mercy on yower souls!"

"Piss off, man, you're sucking my dick. We're eating."

"Yower living in a land of pestilence and evil and y'all are going to die if you don't face up to God's scripture."

The band look at each other and then carefully inspect the jacket to see what else is in the teenagers pocket. Like they say – anything can happen. There's a golden rule for bands constantly receiving death threats: never trust an evangelist. They'll pray for your soul and then blow you away just to see if their prayers have been answered.

In Jacksonville, Florida, the previous day, a man who'd been arrested threatened to have his best friend blow up the Beastie Boys concert. The boys have learnt to expect the worst from people, but now is not the time to cause more trouble. Park benches in Georgia are notoriously uncomfortable and there are few hotels this side of Murmansk that will now accept their custom or their costume.

They've already been banned from Eastern Airlines, all Holiday Inns, and most hotels are now phoning the band's next port of call to warn them of the impending cyclone. Even during their brief stay in England last year, they managed to put a hotel's nose permanently out of joint. A small matter of drilling through the floor of their room with jackhammers so they could pass down cans of beer to their friends in the vertically adjacent room. And there's more… much more, embroidering the unrelenting legend.

MCA: "Just before this tour we got thrown out of the Sunset Marquis, which was probably one of the most awesome stories ever…"

That is, until the rest of this story.

"We got all these villas which cost about $10,000 dollars a night because they screwed up our reservation in ordinary rooms. These villas were huge, even the shower room was at least half the size of our tourbus. We had them for one night, so we did it all. We closed the glass shower door and sealed the bottom with towels and filled the marble room up like a swimming pool. It was so def. Then we got in over the door – there were these girls and bottles of champagne floating in the water. It was awesome. I realise this is difficult to believe, but it's true…"

Ad-Rock: "I was with a girl underwater. Unfortunately, her foot slipped and she kicked the door open…"

MCA: "We all tumbled out with the water which flooded the whole villa. Part of the floor even collapsed. It was so incredible."

Class with a capital K.

Mike D: "The strange thing was they didn't believe us when we said we had a small accident with the shower unit!"

Now there's a surprise. The hotel then claimed the erstwhile swimmers had an orgy out on the lawn and invited a troop of Hell's Angels to the party. In fact, Paul Simonon and Steve Jones came around for tea.

The boys can't even get from A to B without inflicting at least minor damage. The last flight they took almost ended with them being arrested by the FBI after a passenger asked Ad-Rock's girlfriend (Molly Ringwald) for her autograph when they were all "twisted on free liquor". Ad-Rock, upset that he hadn't been recognised, got angry, which led to a food fight, which led to a fist fight, which led to some bizarre in-flight entertainment.

Alone and isolated from each other, the trio are calm, caring and (almost) considerate. En masse, one eggs on the other, eggs on the other, until omelette drips off the ceiling, oozes out of the air conditioning vent and the police are called.

The pleasure palace rollercoaster the Beastie Boys frequent is more exotic, but most of the rides are forbidden. The police are just dying for the opportunity to kick the kids out of the playground and teach them a lesson.

Mike D: "They're definitely out for us, man. In Texas, there were narcs at every single show. All these dicks walking around saying, 'Hey, you want some blow? You need something to pep you up?'"

Ad-Rock: "You can usually tell who they are. They're the only guys in the world that ask for nose candy! That went out with fat faces! You gotta remember we're in KKK bible country now. It doesn't take much. The last thing in the world they want is tits on stage."

MCA: "If we did that shit with the cock in New York, no one would give a damn. In New York, I've seen stuff that offends even me. Forget Karen Findlay and the yums. I've seen a guy at the Cat Club shooting up, throwing up all over himself, and then covering himself with lighter fluid and setting light to himself. When he pulled the needle out of his arm, there was blood and stuff pouring out everywhere. That was serious stuff." »

Mike D: "I can't see that going down too well in Alabama! There are a lot of people doing far more offensive things than we'd ever do, but they're not No 1 and they've not been on national TV doing it."

The Beastie Boys are clowns, but they are nobody's fool.

Take three, four, five and six. Take anything, but take it. Another day, another state, another state of confusion.

"Yo look, they got graffiti in Alabama!"

"Yo, real hip-hop stuff, dude. What's it say?"

"Jesus saves."

"God, I hate this place," Mike D shakes his head. "I just know we're gonna get shot one day in a place like this."

He looks rueful, staring at a dart that was thrown on stage last night. "Look at this. Where the hell do these people think they are? An English football match?"

Five minutes after arriving in the hotel, Dave Scilken, the Beasties' part-time tour coordinator and full-time pimp, prowls the lobby searching for a candidate for the Beastie cage that night.

Ad-Rock has other ideas: "I've got half an hour before the soundcheck, you wanna come upstairs? No? Your father's a Baptist preacher? You've gotta go to church? No shit. I was saved last night."

> "My god, they've got their pieces out! Let's get out of here!"

Mike has ideas other than the other ideas: "I think the most important thing with this tour and with life in general is to have as much sex in public as you possibly can. When there are 250 girls every night showing you their tits and wanting to get down with you, what the hell are you supposed to do?"

Feed the budgerigar? Take up raffia-work? Say no?

"Besides, being well behaved on tour really sucks. Who would want to be with Duran Duran!"

Cue Ad-Rock's def(t) Rik Mayall impressions.

"Simon, your hair looked just awful tonight. Who's nicked my Aquanet? Nick, you bastard, give it back. We're getting in the limo without you!"

Utterly irresponsible and gloriously funny, the Beasties are the first band to make the likes of Duran and Wham! look very old. Annie Lennox appears like Grandma Moses and Bono smells ready for embalming. Youth is on sale 24 hours a day and ideology can be purchased at below-market prices.

Advance ticket sales for the Birmingham, Alabama, show were the lowest on the tour, all because some teenage girl rung up a local radio station and told the world that she had heard the Beastie Boys say on MTV that they didn't want blacks at their concerts. Anywhere else and this calumny wouldn't have been given leg room, but not in Birmingham. Rumours escalated to such a degree that the mayor and the governor were hauled into the controversy and the gig was nearly cancelled. The mayor was even given tapes of all their MTV interviews in order to vindicate the baseball brats.

The fact that the boys have a black manager, a black DJ, a black accountant, a black assistant tour manager, and usually tour with Run-DMC, at no time entered into the discussions. The boys were understandably annoyed.

Or, to put it another way, Mike: "They're assholes."

They're not assholes, they're azaleas. Though the band were eventually cleared, various radio and TV stations were demanding interviews. They got more than they bargained for…

On the radio, all went FM smooth until the phone-in. "We heard some rumour about us not wanting blacks at the gig. That would be a pity, because half our party couldn't come to the show."

On the TV, Hurricane produced his star turn, before turning the TV crew white.

MCA: "It's probably best if DJ Hurricane speaks for us."

Cane: "Oh thank you, Massa Yauch, thank you. Why Massa Yauch he been so good to me, he pulled me outta dem cotton fields and told me to stop pickin' and start scratching records. That's what he done told me. He been good to us niggers…"

Great. Cane was talking to people who couldn't tell irony from an iron bar. After the interview, one executive finally summoned up the courage to ask Mike D if the band were, um… joking.

"This whole town's a joke."

Hurricane carries a loaded piece in his pocket at all times. It's a water pistol which he uses all too frequently. This may tell you something about the Beastie Boys. Russell Simmons tells them something else.

"Now remember, boys, we don't want no repeat of last night. It's Alabama, it's Sunday, so let's ease up a little…"

And so it started, again.

"Yo, Birmingham, let's see some breasts!"

I feel I've been here before. Either that or I've started the same feature twice.

"We hear in Birmingham you love the governor."

No, same feature. Same story, same excitement, different police. Bad business is good for business. Restraint from last night soon begins to tell after the show. Back at the hotel, the scenes of carnage are all too apparent. A layer of cotton, rubber, and glass carpet the floor as various females try and convince the Beastlike entourage of the virtues of Southern hospitality. One girl runs up the corridor screaming, AC/DC is wailing louder and in the midst of the pandemonium a poor middle-aged man stands in the corridor perhaps trying to find his room. Ad-Rock and Mike close the door on the mayhem and smile. "Being No 1 does have a few advantages."

Mike Diamond wants to visit Fortnum & Mason for tea when the Beasties tour here in May. This may tell you something about Fortnum & Mason. Despite their nocturnal wanderlust, the Beasties themselves are great believers in safe sex. Their tour contract even asks that promoters supply at least 12 rubbers backstage with the liquor. "If they're not there, we don't go on." Budweiser may be suing them for "misrepresentation of their product", but the band could certainly obtain sponsorship from elsewhere.

There's more commotion outside the room. The man in the overcoat doesn't look lost any more. Instead he pulls out an undercover badge and starts interrogating Dave the tour manager.

"Do you know how old that girl was?"

"I never touched her!"

"She's no more than 15. Do you know what the penalty for this kind of thing is in Alabama? I'm going to have to take all your names."

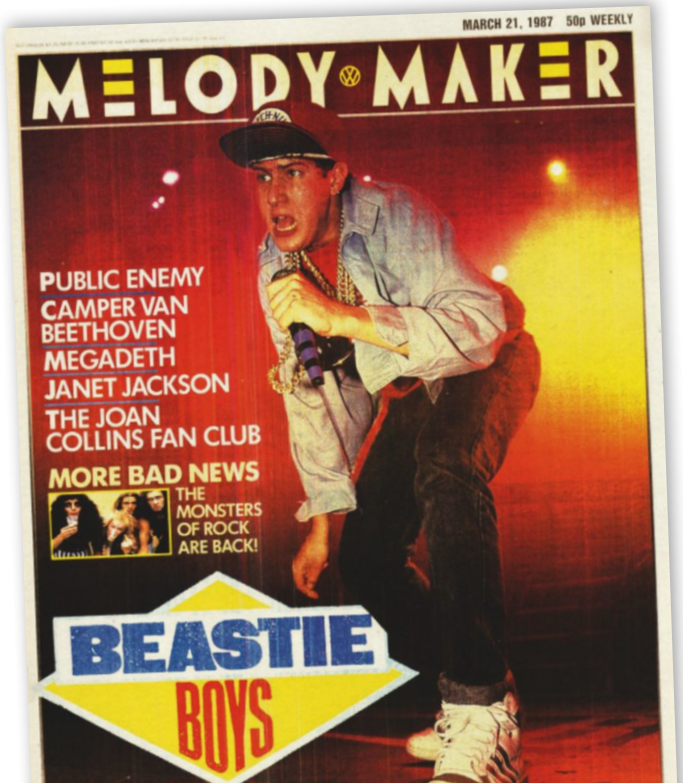
Oh dear. The tragic irony was that the screamer was probably the only girl on the floor who wasn't being given the benefit of ABC B-boy tuition. The Beasties are amateur naturalists and can spot a fruit bat in the dark at 60 paces.

Sean, the tour manager, takes charge of the situation.

"Right, I'm taking charge of the situation. We've got two hours before that bloke's incident report becomes a warrant for our arrest. That gives us two hours to cross the state line…"

Oh dear, oh dear. Just like on the movies – a B-boy B-movie.

Take the money and run. Just the accountant and a couple of the road crew left in the hotel now, but things move from bad to worse as another



The Beasties and DJ Hurricane perform on TV and (inset) on stage with a caged go-go dancer

patrol car pulls alongside the bus. By now Russell had checked his cool into the left-luggage department at the airport.

"My god, they've got their pieces out! Shit, man, let's get out of here!"

Understatement of the year! Scared and scarred, the bus pulls off to the strains of Sam Cooke and the Ramones as everyone waits for the sound of the siren.

"I'm never coming here again," MCA sighs. "The place is filled with Mormons."

"I've got a cold idea," Ad-Rock interrupts with pupils that misspell mischief. "Let's stop at the first truck stop across the state line, get something to eat and then we can wave at the police on the other side."

Great idea, Horovitz. Why not erect a burning cross and piss on it too? Now MCA's eyes light up.

"Have we passed the line? Where are we now?"

"YO, ***BAD NEWS*** is the best video ever!" The boys have trouble containing their rampant enthusiasm. "*The Young Ones* are *so* def. Rik Mayall's a fuckin' genius. Megadeth are the most bogus band we've ever seen. They almost cried when they were heckled in New York last year. It was pathetic. Public Enemy are pretty cold, though. "

The tourbus stops, but Russell's mouth is still moving into overdrive. The chosen "safe" truck stop was filled with plaid shirts, braces and biceps – all of which expanded upon our arrival. The good 'ol boys didn't look too pleased to see us. Even the toilet was plastered with Klan memorabilia.

"How d'ya think a nigger like me likes all that shit you've got on the walls in there," Simmons smiles at the waitress.

"Please keep your voice down, sir."

"Oh, so you got the Klan in here, huh? Is that right? Is that what you're saying?" MCA shakes his head, Ad-Rock shifts uncomfortably in his seat, and everyone else desperately tries to disassociate themselves from Russell's rant.

"Please keep your voice DOWN, sir."

Clink. The penny finally dropped as the shaken manager slowly lifted his jaw off the Formica table.

"You mean…"

"Can I take your order now, sir?"

MCA: "I'll take a burger… to go."

The bus: three Jews, four blacks and three limeys.

The verdict: move.

And we went, just like *Southern Comfort*.

"How'd you know we're doing a movie?"

I always think faster when I've just been run out of a state. The Beastie Boys' film, provisionally (and aptly) titled *Scared Stupid*, is due to be filmed straight after their world tour ends. Its antecedents lay in the outtakes from Abbott & Costello's *A Haunting We Will Go* and involves the down-and-well-out Beasties travelling to a ghost-ridden house to hear the reading of a will following a death in the family. Ad-Rock is still under the impression that Robert De Niro will leap at the chance to play a cameo part as Bobby and Adam's dad (celebrated New York playwright Israel Horovitz) go back a long way. Probably not long enough.

MCA: "This film will launch the Beastie Boys into something that'll top The Beatles by megabucks. The film's not going to be a bullshit thing like *Hard Day's Night*. The movie will stand out on its own and will contain some music so we can pick videos from it for MTV to use as advertising.

"I'd say without hesitation that it'll be the media event of the century. The three of us are going to change the structure of government in this country. We're going to turn the presidency of the US into a puppet figure…"

You're too late.

"The Beastie Boys will actually be running the country."

Can't wait.

Mike D: "We're going to have lotsa barbecues on the White House lawn – 24 hours a day."

MCA: "And legalise opium and LSD…"

Ad-Rock: "And pass a law stating that Dolly Parton has to show her tits on national television twice a day."

MCA: "And then there's the legalising of all pornography…"

Mike D: "And I want to make pro-wrestling more violent. So you can actually see death."

Ad-Rock: "After putting in pool tables and slot machines in every home in the country, we're going to bury all nuclear weapons."

Mike D: "And no guns. Fighting will only be permitted with baseball bats. It's so much more American that way."

And the Beastie Boys are all-American boys.

The trio magnify and amplify the US way of life to such proportions, it appears frightening because it's uncontrollable and monstrous, and monstrous because it's grotesque, and grotesque because it's true yet disfigured.

Several Hollywood film companies have already made out contracts with dotted signature lines, but the band want to limit the budget and heighten their control over the project – like their absolute control over everything connected with Beastie – from the merchandising of caps to the height of their inflatable prick. There's only one problem now. Scriptwriter and neighbourhood wastrel Tom Cushman can't think of an ending for the movie.

"In the end, the house blows up and somehow the Beastie Boys survive. Trouble is, I can't work out how to save them. They're probably beyond saving anyway."

"Where are we now?" MCA inquires.

Close to the last word and nearer to South Carolina.

"What goes on down there?"

"Nothing much."

"Oh no?" Oh no.

CUT! I opened the door and found freedom. *Ted Mico* •

GETTY

# "We're losers. We're puds. We're pathetic!"

**BIG BLACK are the best of America's new guitar bands, writing brutal songs about damaged humanity. "Our lives would be just so much worse without Big Black," says one. "Without Big Black we might turn into the sickos we write about."**

ALAN REEVALL

Big Black in 1987: (l–r) Santiago Durango, Steve Albini and Dave Riley (kneeling)

— MM FEB 28 —

**BIG BLACK. ONE** of the rock names. BIG BLACK says it all. The looming threat. The black hole of noise. The yawning abyss of horror that swallows up all the words we can muster in our attempts to master the experience.

Big Black are alive to the psychedelic possibilities of horror. They are drawn, instinctively, to those phenomena – atrocity, psychosis, calamity – before which the mind reels and language dries up. If fascination is a fixation on an ineffable, arbitrary manifestation of beauty, then horror is simply the inversion of fascination – that chaste, hideous rapture that comes when the mind faces that which undoes it, the unaccountable. Awe (a word which contains both wonder and terror), the ecstasy of dread that comes when meaning fails – these dark, religious feelings that shudder at the heart of Big Black.

Big Black have hit upon a kind of subterranean psychedelia, music whose message is not "rise above", but "let's submerge". There are several solutions to the problem of escaping the cage of identity – "make music to satisfy angels" (Paul Morley), "play like beasts" (Lester Bangs) – but Big Black have located a kind of liberation in the mechanical. Like Swans, they have turned themselves into a pop abattoir, a concussion machine whose function is not to expand consciousness, but to compress it, obliterate it.

So, I meet Big Black and what I really want to know is what is it about them, about me, about all other like minds, that draws us to this metaphoric self-destruction? Why is it that these sensitive, caring boys, these self-confessed wimps, avowed humanists, are obsessed by everything that subverts the humanist project, all the traumas and sicknesses that contradict our faith in perfection and progress?

Big Black – at some instinctive level – resist the kind of liberal humanism that invents a notion like "death education": the delusion that you can prepare people for this arbitrary, terroristic fact of life, somehow cope with this final sick joke! Big Black want to restore to us the vividness of death, of the threshold situations that compromise our balance lives.

"What it is," says Steve Albini, singer and guitarist, "is that I just happen to have a fascination for certain kinds of human interaction – where people try to dominate each other, or the means of expression people resort to when pushed to their absolute limits. When people go beyond their training and morals and do exactly what their urges tell them to do, they are, in a sense, being most true to themselves. What intrigues me is that here are situations and phenomena that are severe, and yet I can't understand them."

Does the fascination lie in being confronted with the sheer arbitrariness of tyrannical reality?

"Well, recognising that you are helpless, that you have no power, over others, over your own drives – facing that, accepting it, is a step to stability. Because, if you think you've got the reins of your life in your hands, you're wrong! But basically, there's something fascinating about the dirtiness of things going wrong that really stimulates me. I can't explain it, just acknowledge it."

> "Recognising that you have no power is a step to stability"

Does the pleasure reside in the disorientation induced by the manageable? Or are our nerves so enfeebled that only violent music and violent imagery can wake us up? It's a truism that the presence of death makes us feel more alive.

Bassist Dave Riley speaks: "When I hear the word 'violence', I think of 'victim'. When I think of 'aggression', I think of intensity. Big Black are about intensity."

Santiago Durango, guitarist: "And the opposite of intensity is numbness – who wants to listen to music like that, to live like that? My life is so boring and regular, I need this kind of disruption."

I tell them my interpretation of "Kerosene", their masterpiece: that this story of a man so bored he sets himself on fire is like a metaphor for the Big Black method – their music is an equally drastic solution to inertia, a metaphorical self-immolation.

Dave: "That's quite neat, but actually the song is about something different. It's been widely misinterpreted as being about gang raping a woman and then burning her to death, and we have received a lot of shit about it.

"In actual fact, the song is about American small towns where life is so boring, there's only two things to do. Go blow up a whole load of stuff for fun. Or have a lot of sex with the one girl in town who'll have sex with anyone. 'Kerosene' is about a guy who tries to combine the two pleasures."

It's as if Big Black use other people's most extreme moments of reality – madness and death – as an escape from their reality. The horror that is someone else's life becomes for them a kind of oblivion.

Don't they worry that they'll develop a tolerance to all this? And that if they try to maintain the level of impact by piling on yet more noise/horror, they'll get sucked into an upward spiral whose ultimate destination is total musical seizure/sensory burnout?

Santiago: "If we reach the point where we can't add any more, we'll stop. Once we've shot our wad, seen Jesus, we'll give it up."

Dave: "Getting numb to our own material is not really a problem. It's not like we have this stable version of the set, which we've honed over the months. Becoming familiar with our material is helpful, because it allows us to improvise. Someone will always throw in a new rent…"

Santiago: "The song defines the parameters within which we can be creative."

What I like about Big Black is that there's a kind of lucidity to the violence – it's not a fog of noise, everything is picked out articulately, for maximum impact.

Dave: "That's what I liked about the band when I joined – everything's focused."

Big Black are not about making an incompetent din. Unlike British noise groups, I don't get the impression that you're frightened of virtuosity.

Dave: "Getting skilled, acquiring knowledge of music theory, these are not problems. The point is to eliminate those skills and pieces of theory that are not appropriate at any given time. Knowledge is not a problem, knowledge is power. What you need is the right mindset, the attitude to use that knowledge well."

Santiago: "It's the same with learning to use studios. The studio is just a big instrument."

Will Big Black start to take on other textures apart from guitars, exploit other kinds of noise-making technology?

Dave: "Well, there's a synthesizer on 'Bad Houses'. We've done some primitive sampling. I've got a sax I can't play. We're working with Vocoders."

Steve: "You see, I hate the human voice. Our idea is to tamper with my voice as much as possible, and then bury it at the back of the mix. We're working on this song where we put the whole track through the Vocoder, so that my voice comes out composed of the same material as the music, and there's just this flurry of consonants under the beat."

Santiago: "The guitars are basically the thing, though – we'll bend, we'll add certain elements – but guitars are what it's all about. And that's basically because they're extensions of our cocks, and we love them."

Dave: "We're puds. Jerks, but it's much better to be a pud with a guitar than a pud without a guitar."

This is as much the heart of Big Black as any fancy theory of transcendence through noise and horror. They're so sweet, so meek and mild-mannered, these boys, possessed with the spindly, bespectacled air of God's Chosen computer operators… and yet these Woody Allen geeks have a strange other-life on stage, where they metamorphose into a monstrous, glorious death machine. What went wrong?

Santiago: "We were never in the mainstream while growing up, we were isolated at school, we all have terrible problems with women."

Dave (*mock hysterical*): "I told you – we're losers, we're puds. We're pathetic!"

# WHITE DOPES ON PUNK

July 24, 1987: Big Black's Steve Albini at the Clarendon Ballroom, Hammersmith, on a bill with Head Of David and AC Temple

Sounds like the classic course of development for rock musicians, rock critics, fanzine writers, and indeed anyone who gets into "difficult" or "alternative" music.

Dave: "Yeah, you're a loner, you want to be one-up over everyone else. Plus, you want to belong, somewhere. I mean, I never met anyone who had a good adolescence that I even wanna associate with!"

So, life's losers achieve a strange kind of triumph on stage, reinvent themselves through rock noise.

Santiago: "Our lives would be just so much worse without Big Black. Without Big Black we might turn into the sickos we write about."

**STEVE ALBINI LOOKS** like a fanzine editor – stoop-shouldered, with arms as thin as twigs and an air of bespectacled intensity about him. His writing for US hardcore rag *Forced Exposure* has won him notoriety, even persecution. Each day he returns home from work (as a photo retoucher in Chicago), checks his answering machine and finds at least two or three detailed messages of abuse. He's left *Forced Exposure* now, after a piece entitled "Guide For Social Tards" was printed under his name, 90 per cent of which had been written by someone else.

"It was a crap piece of writing. I don't mind making myself look stupid. In fact, I'm probably the best at it. So, what annoyed me was amateurs messing where professionals should be."

Albini resents and resists any idea that there is an American "movement" of noise bands, groups like Scratch Acid, Sonic Youth, Butthole Surfers, Swans, Live Skull…

"Sure, everyone knows everyone else, has each other's phone numbers, plays the same clubs. But musically, all you can say that we have in common is that we're all American, all like electric guitars, and are all inspired by punk rock. Anything more specific than that is misleading. We start from the same origin, but go in very different directions."

But isn't there at least a similarity of intended effect? Unlike, say, soulboys or singer-songwriters, who want to strengthen the listener's sense and identity and reinforce values, aren't your kind of bands into the pursuit of oblivion, using noise and horror, to put the self in jeopardy?

"Well, certainly, the whole thing is about reaching that point where your eyes roll back and you get dizzy! Like the first time me and my friend heard the Ramones. All we could say was, 'Fuck!' That was it for me, the beginning. I wasn't even dissatisfied with music before punk, because I didn't listen to music at all."

Perhaps what fascinates Albini about power and domination is the spectacle of pure will. You could define violence as the refusal to argue, to give an account, to justify. Maybe the kind of people who've worked around the noise/horror interface – intellectual geeks – are secretly envious of the sheer will to power, to action, that marks the psychos, fanatics, führers, shamans they deal with. The kind of potency and singlemindedness that is missing from our aimless, debilitated lives. But on stage or in print, we can live like fanatics, monsters, live with murderous edge, high on "attitude".

I speak to Big Black while they are in the middle of recording one side of their new LP in London. Before then, in a week or two, there'll be an EP with the promising title "Headache". Tell us about the new material, Steve.

"One song on the new LP, called 'El Dopa', is about a sleeping-sickness epidemic in America in 1926. It's a true story I read about in a book called *The Awakening*, written by Dr Oliver Sachs, the guy responsible for waking up all these people from deep sleep. Some were woken up as late as 1965, awoke to find themselves old people, their entire productive life just slept away. And all these people either committed suicide or asked to be killed. They were so fucked up, so unable to cope with what they'd lost, that they wanted to throw away the little they had left.

"There's a song called 'Bad Penny', which is about the kind of person who just won't get out of your life, who sticks around and stirs up shit, in your name. 'My Disco' is the true story of a physician who has a kid that has brain damage. And rather than live with that, he beats his way into the maternity ward, grabs the baby and bounces it off the floor until it dies. The amazing thing is that the guy doesn't get sent to jail forever, he's found guilty of aggravated manslaughter, and spends maybe a year in jail. So somehow, he managed to convince a jury that, hell, it wasn't such a bad thing to smash a baby on a hospital floor because he was too dumb and ugly to be in your family. Any of you guys woulda done the same. That's weird! Can you imagine this guy thinking it through, carrying out the whole operation – punching out nurses, swerving through the hospital corridors and bouncing his child off the floor."

Albini and his group find a terrible poetry in the intractable, the unbudgeable, the indelible. Their music is as desperate a response to these things as any in the stories of their songs. They are drawn to desperation as to a heady drug.

"The thing about these phenomena is that they aren't that unusual, you have to face the fact that you too could be driven to these lengths. I use true stories because I couldn't think up these things. But I don't have to look."

Big Black want to make us feel awe. The paradox of Big Black is that they immerse us, deluge us in defilement and desecration, and yet product sacred feelings. I feel small before the scale of the experiences they deal in, small and religious in the face of the beauty of terror, the terror of beauty.

Live, when Steve Albini plays guitar with his teeth, I think I see God. *Simon Reynolds* •

RICHARD BELLIA

# 1987

APRIL – JUNE

## GEORGE MICHAEL, THE CURE, PRIMAL SCREAM, HÜSKER DÜ AND MORE

July 21, 1987: The Mission's Wayne Hussey at the third annual Pukkelpop festival, near Hasselt in Belgium

# "Buying a house outside Bristol"

**MM APR 18 Big, "flippant" goth band to headline major UK festival.**

THE MISSION LOOK set to headline the Friday-night opening of this year's Reading Festival, which celebrates its 25th birthday. The Mission, meanwhile, went off to America this week for a six-week headline tour following their recent British dates. They return to Britain in the summer to go into the studio and begin work on a new album. The projected Reading date would be their only appearance in this country for the rest of the year, apart from a fan club-only show which has yet to be arranged.

Wayne Hussey left a typically flippant message behind in England for anyone who might enquire about his activities: "Tell them I'm buying a house outside of Bristol and I'm having a secret affair with a married woman."

PHIL NICHOLLS

Beastie Boy Ad-Rock (right) pleads not guilty to a charge of grievous bodily harm in Liverpool

# Free to continue touring

## MM JUN 6 Beastie Boy bailed, tabloid rags rejoice...

**BEASTIE BOY AD-ROCK** was this week accused of injuring a girl fan during the group's headlining show at the Liverpool Royal Court on Saturday. Ad-Rock, charged under his real name of Adam Horowitz, pleaded not guilty at Merseyside City Magistrates Court on Monday to unlawfully and maliciously causing grievous bodily harm to Joanne Marie Clark.

The case was remanded to a date in July and Ad-Rock granted bail on a surety of £10,000. Permitted to keep his passport, he is now free to continue touring with the Beastie Boys, whose next dates are in Japan. Ad-Rock, who had returned to London with the rest of the band after a "near riot" at Liverpool, was arrested and taken to Notting Hill police station. He was held there until Merseyside police arrived to take him back to Liverpool.

According to eyewitnesses, the trouble at the Royal Court erupted when a "large minority" of the 1,600-capacity crowd bombarded the two support acts with missiles and abuse. The Beastie Boys came on stage to be showered with an assortment of objects, including beer cans and bottles smuggled into the gig. By the time they'd reached the end of the first number, they'd already appealed to the audience to calm down.

A witness said: "The band were the voice of reason, unlike their image and unlike their audience. But it became clear that they were themselves in danger, and the show had to stop after 15 minutes. Until the last minute, when they began fielding cans with a baseball bat, they had done nothing to incite any trouble."

When the show was stopped, a battle broke out between punters in the stalls and the balcony, with chairs smashed and speakers being pulled over. Panic grew as a tear-gas canister exploded, and by the time the police arrived the legitimate fans had all left the venue. An estimated 150 "ringleaders" were left in the building, still causing trouble. Five arrests were made and five injuries reported.

There are reports of weapons being confiscated at the door of the venue, and of arrests being made in the city later that night. Local radio was meanwhile broadcasting a recording of bragging louts shouting, "We got the Beasties."

The theatre, which had sent representatives to check out the Beasties' trouble-free Manchester concert, had doubled its security for the event. They are now urging fans to hold on to their tickets until an announcement is made regarding refunds.

Witnesses all agree that there was a "terrace mentality" about the behaviour of a certain section of the audience – a section that had never heard of the Beastie Boys until Fleet Street launched its sensationalist "shock horror" campaign, thus encouraging a hooligan element to come to the gig in search of trouble.

The Fleet Street hysteria over the Beasties' presence at the Montreux Rock Festival continued with their arrival in Britain for the Run-DMC tour. Despite reports of "mayhem and trouble" at the gigs, there had, until Liverpool, been no incidents at all. Nor had there been any of the reported problems connected with hotels. The dailies, however, were determined to wring every last drop of sensation from the band's visit. A Def Jam press officer was followed to and from her home by journalists who believed she would lead them to the Beastie Boys. And a story in *The Sun* of May 27, which said that "newsgirl Laura Walsh...was captured by rock's Beastie Boys and locked up in a cage on stage", has been dismissed as a set-up job. *The Sun* said that Walsh was kidnapped by two of the band's minders, forced to go into the cage, stripped and humiliated by the band.

A Def Jam spokeswoman said: "This reporter used to work on *The Sun*, apparently. Now she's a freelancer. I was talking to the person who was supposed to have kidnapped her. And what happened was she came along and said she wanted to dance in the cage. They asked her about four times, 'Are you sure you really want to do this?' As soon as she got out, she went on the phone and sold her story.

"The whole band are fed up about all these stories. They are supposed to have come into the airport shouting, 'We hate Britain,' and the group are saying, 'How can the papers say that when there were so many people around who knew we weren't saying that at all?' They just can't believe how they've been hounded."

One story, however, turned out to be true. A Beastie Boy did, understandably, spit at a *Mirror* reporter. The band, meanwhile, say they won't be back to play in Britain "for a long time".

RON GALELLA, LTD. / GETTY

# Vinyl's days numbered?

## MM MAY 16 Virgin raises LP prices as CDs get cheaper.

**THE DEMISE OF** the conventional vinyl LP came a step closer this week with the news that Virgin have raised the prices of their albums – a move that traditionally inspires other majors to follow suit. The price hike will mean that Virgin LPs will now sell for around £7.40 before discount, and many believe that £7.40 for a piece of plastic invariably covered in surface noise will not endear itself as CD prices continue to fall below a tenner.

With the proposed launch of the cassette single in July, it looks as if vinyl's days are numbered. As singles sales drop, Polygram chief Maurice Oberstein has "strongly urged" all BPI member record companies to produce their Top 50 singles in cassette format.

Dealer price will be the same as a normal 12-inch, meaning improved profits for the manufacturers because cassettes are vastly cheaper to make.

# "It would be quite wrong"

## NME JUN 27 Michael Jackson cannot buy John Merrick...

**MICHAEL JACKSON HAS** been thwarted in his $1 million bid to buy the remains of Elephant Man John Merrick. The London Medical College, where the remains are on display, said Jacko wouldn't be allowed to buy the skeleton no matter how much money he offered. "There is a very strong feeling that it would be quite wrong on ethical grounds to sell John Merrick's remains for money," said college secretary David Edwards.

Jacko's heart is apparently set on acquiring the skeleton of the one-time human freak show, who died in 1890, for the private museum at his home in LA.

The weird 28-year-old singer has been to the college twice to see the remains, and is reported to be fascinated by their "ethical, medical and historical significance". He doubled his offer for the remains after his original bid of $500,000 was rejected out of hand.

Simon: Albert Hall shows to be picketed

# Broke the boycott

**NME APR 11** Jerry Dammers will not let Paul Simon's *Graceland* lie.

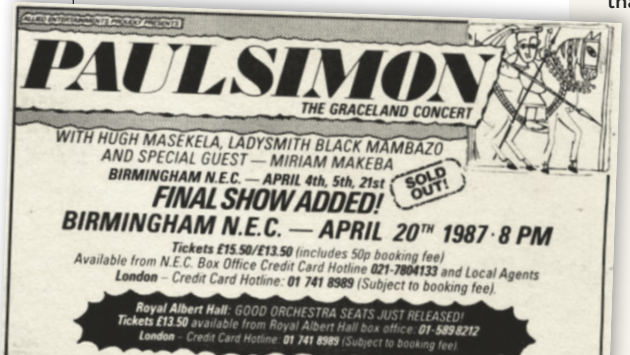
**PAUL SIMON WAS** due to be handed a letter from Jerry Dammers on Tuesday, calling for him to make a public apology to the United Nations for breaking the cultural boycott of South Africa by recording part of his *Graceland* album in the country.

The letter, signed by Dammers along with Paul Weller and Billy Bragg, was due to be handed to Simon just hours before the first London concert of the *Graceland* tour at the Royal Albert Hall.

The opening part reads: "As fellow musicians we ask you to give a complete and heartfelt public apology to the United Nations General Assembly for breaching the cultural, academic and other boycotts of South Africa, which they called for on the recommendation of the United Nations Special Committee on Apartheid on December 16, 1980. We also call on you to give an assurance that you will not breach these boycotts in any way in the future."

It goes on to point out how Simon broke the boycott by his own definition and implores him to reconsider his current silence on the matter.

Simon's first British concert, at the Birmingham NEC on Saturday, was picketed by the city's branch of the Anti-Apartheid Movement, and the London committee was expected to do the same at the Royal Albert Hall this week.




## SHRINK RAP! MARY MARY

**MM JUN 13** Mary from grebo faves Gaye Bykers On Acid is on the *Maker*'s couch.

Mary "Mary" Byker: likes "The Planets", dislikes Tory councillors

### Crazyhead
They wouldn't be anywhere if it wasn't for us.

### Bomb Party
I wouldn't be anywhere if it wasn't for them.

### Ian Astbury's girlfriend
Good hairdresser. Nice girl.

### Rock'n'roll
Good fun and fuck the Tory bastards! Let the children have their way. Go away, you horrible Tory bastards.

### Lester Piggott
Sorry, son, you didn't get away with it. It comes to us all in the end. Keep your books properly next time.

### Madonna
Beautiful, talented, wonderful. Dig your navel.

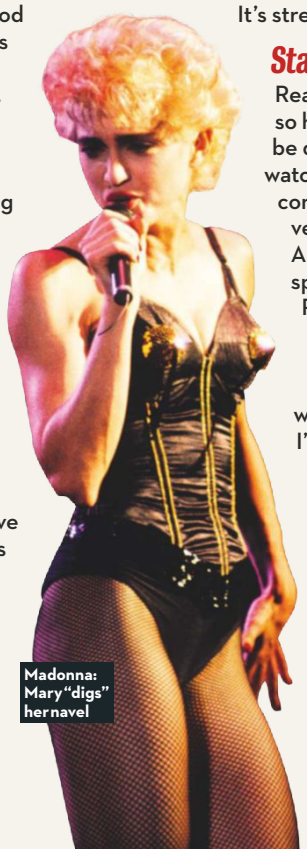
### Eddie Kendricks
Keep on truckin'! I think if any band inspired lots of musicians in the '60s then The Temptations were the band, and if you want to listen to Captain Beefheart then listen to The Temptations as well. Excellent band, good time, good words. "Ball Of Confusion" has to be one of the best songs ever written. Eddie Kendricks, what a *now* man.

### Ego
A surmountable problem. Thing is, loss of ego and build-up of ego at the same time is something that is hard to surmount, when you're trying to lose it but gaining it by the very nature of what you're doing. How to control it? Just stay humble. Realise you're no better than anyone else. Definitely something that, by experiencing, you have to control. Oh yeah, I've been a wanker. Everybody's been a wanker, but your ego's... Wisdom is a totally important thing – by age, experience and life you experience more. Wisdom comes from excess and you trim the excess when there's too much of it and ego is something if you're gonna curb it you *curb it*. I don't set myself apart from anybody else. Ego's a great question. Stumped me.

### Tory councillors
This is personal against [GBOA bassist] Robber's dad now. Plain, boring, dull people that don't admit to their own ego complex. Usually insignificant little people who smell power. Tory councillors stink.

### Guitar solos
Love 'em, if they're played with passion, nice and powerful. Everyone's a sucker for a solo now and again. The ultimate in public masturbation.

### Hip hop
Some of it's good. It's like Led Zeppelin. Some of it's good. Some of it's bad. It's street.

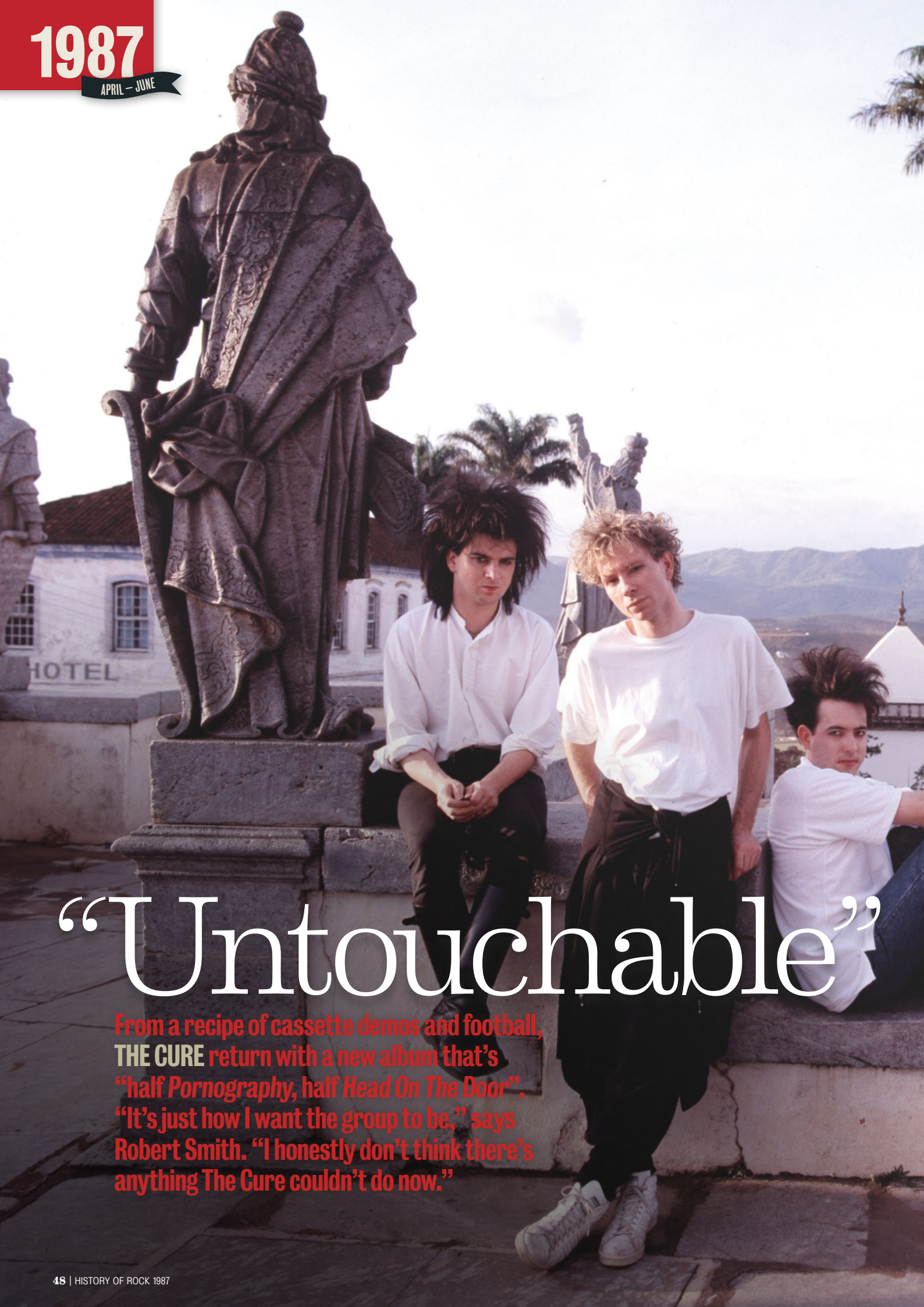


Madonna: Mary "digs" her navel

### Star Trek
Really good. Something that's so humorous, that set out to be deadly sincere, so good to watch, turning out to be deadly comical. Great programme, very much a pointer for '60s America, meaning confronting space, something that Ronald Reagan's probably watched too much of. Something that's been so big an influence on America, that we've got a *lot* to question. I'd rather read *2000AD* than watch *Star Trek*.

### Classical Music
Dvořák's "New World Symphony", "Planet Suite" by Holst and Vivaldi's "Four Seasons". "The Planets" is the most heavy metal thing I've ever heard. Black Sabbath, Ozzy Osbourne, what a god!

REX FEATURES, DEREK RIDGERS, KEVIN MAZUR / GETTY




# "Untouchable"

**From a recipe of cassette demos and football, THE CURE return with a new album that's "half *Pornography*, half *Head On The Door*". "It's just how I want the group to be," says Robert Smith. "I honestly don't think there's anything The Cure couldn't do now."**

The Cure between eight dates in Brazil in March 1987: (l–r) Simon Gallup, Boris Williams, Robert Smith, Lol Tolhurst and Porl Thompson

MICHAEL PUTLAND / GETTY

## — MELODY MAKER APRIL 11 —

"I **THOUGHT I WAS** destined for great things," says Robert Smith. "And just look at me now. I'm in the scurriest, laziest group in the world, dressed in a bloody animal suit!"

It's true, Robert's at Mary Tyler Moore's TV studio in Bray, Southern Ireland. He's making a video for "Why Can't I Be You", The Cure's first single in over a year, and he's dressed as… a polar bear?

"More like a gay Viking," says Simon.

He can talk. He's dressed as a crow or something – black cape, big yellow beak and ball-crusher tights. "I feel like Spider-Man," he moans, "when he had on the alien suit and it started attacking him."

"Sorry," Robert apologies. "Next time we'll do a video somewhere really hot, just strumming…"

"Yeah," says Lol, "or in a pub, drinking."

It must have seemed a good idea at the time, sitting over local Guinness in a castle retreat, discussing plans to present The Cure in an ever more ludicrous light with Tim Pope, the man behind their other infamous video fiascos and the extraordinary *Cure In Orange* film, about to go on general release – a live set shot in the Roman amphitheatre in Orange, Southern France, which gives the dual impression that you're there watching and playing the set simultaneously.

Now no one seems quite so sure what's going on. Boris has rather worryingly taken to his schoolgirl costume, Lol's blacked-up like "Prince's ugly brother" or "Blind Lemon Tolhurst", Porl is alternately a Scotsman and a floozy, and even Robert's gone and put a dress on.

"This is it," he shouts, "the grand finale, the climax. Drunken Schoolgirl In Gay Sex Orgy!"

It's noted, too late, that in swapping his crow costume for that of a Morris dancer, Simon is the only one who hasn't gone bi. "Ah ha," he beams. "When the newspapers pick up on this, I'll be like the drummer in The Housemartins, the non-gay one!"

"Oh no, I'm beginning to feel guilty." It's Pope. He's already had Lol inside a Humpty Dumpty with a strobe strapped to his chest, and now he's dressed him up as a bumble bee and is about to fly him on wires. Long convinced that all Cure videos are vindictive attacks on poor Lol, Pope's now telling him he has nothing to worry about.

"Sure," says Lol. "See you chaps in the next world."

We haven't heard or seem much of The Cure over the past year, but what news has reached us has all been good. Apart from the film, the band have re-signed through Fiction to Polydor, a deal so lucrative that Robert has been spending his time out of the country on his accountant's advice. While the others have bought homes in England, Robert's been to Compass Point, New York and Brussels with co-producer Dave Allen, mixing *Kiss Me Kiss Me Kiss Me*, a double album recorded in Mirabelle, Southern France, last autumn.

Released in May, it's The Cure's richest, most exotic and most accessible album to date, a veritable treasure trove of experiments boldly attempted and beautifully performed. Not wanting to jump the gun too soon, I'll just say it's so confident, it goes against character and, rather than fleeing past Cure styles for fear of stagnation, it embraces them all and does some funky stuff too.

There's a drowsy opium sitar anthem, "If Only Tonight We Could Sleep", a scalding wah-wah assault, "The Kiss", some staccato "Hawaii Five-O", "Hey You", and a granite stomp, "Fight". There's over 70 minutes of *Kiss Me…*, both ends burning, and the single, "Why Can't I Be You?", is a razzmatazz brass quadrille, absurd, joyous and loud.

The Cure are in Ireland just prior to setting off to conquer South America and I wonder whether, like me, they consider they've reached some sort of peak?

"It's funny," says Lol, "I never see us in peaks. I see us in levels all the time. I've yet to find, in my mind, a level where we'd come right to the top. There are more levels yet. Whatever happens, you have to ride on the crest of the wave and that precipitates the next thing. If you sat there and analysed it too much, you'd lose what it was that would make the next thing better."

So, with a million in the bank and a song in your hearts, what's the motivation these days?

"I've always maintained that I'm doing it for selfish reasons, and I still do. The main reason I do it is because I enjoy it," says Robert. "I don't give a fuck – I like making records and I like going on stage and singing, and there's a part of me, really, that's a show-off, there must be. I always consider it to be really out of character, but it can't be really – I wouldn't do it otherwise. I enjoy it… I almost feel guilty about enjoying it, I don't think it's right…

"I don't like the idea of fame, I've never accepted that. I've experienced it to a small degree in France and it's cack, not being able to go out without people coming up and going, 'You're Robert Smith.' You become less than human. The reason, more and more, that I continue is that it has become more important that I see myself from a third person's point of view as someone I can look up towards, that I can respect.

"My motivation now is to try to make The Cure not more popular but to harden the whole thing up so we are untouchable almost. That's what I'm hoping this record will do, so we won't be able to suffer the more cynical *Smash Hits* sort of jibes. And I think we'll achieve it without me having to step into the arena. Next time round, some claim, it's *Wogan* and the dailies for me. Well, I don't accept that. We *will* reach the point of becoming important and yet still be that weird group. We will never be accepted but we will be important, which is perfect.

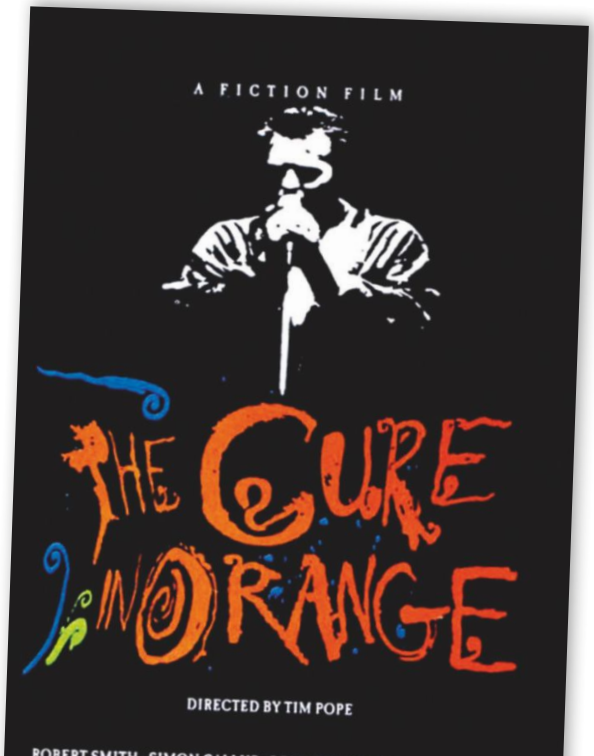
"I mean, anyone with half a brain hates you if you're in the media all the time – the less you're in the public eye, I think, the better off you are. All the people who are gods in the field, like Jack Nicholson or Robert De Niro, aren't in the public eye, and when they do something, you think it's brilliant they're so good, but they don't waste time building up their public image. I can't think of anyone who's constantly in the news who's any good at all.

"We've got where we are almost by accident in one sense, although it's been designed, not for success but for longevity. One thing doesn't follow the other. If this record bombed, I would be surprised, upset in a way, but I wouldn't think it wasn't worth making – that's the difference. Now it's been made and I've heard it, I'm happy. Once it's released, it's gone into a different world. I don't need to justify it, or argue with people who say it's rubbish. I can't be bothered. I think it's really good, so it's being released.

"The whole element of competition I still, and always will, find absurd. The horse race. Are we going to be No 1 or are Queen? It doesn't matter at all because, if I look at the Top 50, I see there are no records I like, so it's a false accolade to be No 1 anyway. The album *should* be No 1, that's all.

"The more we go on, the more I think we're unique. I don't mean that in a big-headed way, but the longer we go on, the less similarities there are between what we're doing and what anyone else has ever done. The stage we're at at the moment is so absurd, the public image of the group

> "The whole element of competition I will always find absurd"



and of me is so… Well, just reading through American reviews, they say we play "compellingly sad music", and on the same page there will be a write-up of our latest video, which is mayhem.

"I think we've overcome the dinosaur tag the *NME* tried to put on us last year. I keep repeating it, but I *am* horrified by the lack of competition. I wanted some records sent over and was reduced to having to listen to the new Deep Purple album. [He smashed it after two tracks.] There are literally only three or four records in the Top 50 that I could even think about listening to, and probably only one that I know I'd enjoy: the Kate Bush singles album."

"I see it as a means to an end," says Lol of The Cure's special purpose. "A way to live your life the way you want to, because in the end that's one of the things music offers and reflects. It offers people a way to live their life the way they want to, not tied to things… I mean, there are things that tie us, but they're probably less than most people ever have. That is my goal – to be rid, in the end, of all the fetters."

"The most cack thing I ever read was something The Thompson Twins said," says Simon. "They said, when they released a single, they used to sweat every Tuesday morning, waiting to hear the chart positions and that they hated every band above them. That's such a cack attitude to take. I mean, we'll probably get in the charts with this single, but we joke about it. Like, it's true – as soon as we go on *Top Of The Pops* we go down, and it's never worried us at all. If we get in the charts, fine. If we don't, fine. We're not competing or anything like that, and we don't hate the bands above us, we hate *all* bands in the charts!

"It's good for us to get in among them on *Top Of The Pops*, though, because if I wasn't in the band, I'd like to see us there. Every other band is so serious about it all, but when we go on we treat it as a piss-up. I can never decide where we fit in. Like, our popularity in France – I think we deserve it, but for the kind of adulation we get we're not the right stereotypes. We don't go, 'Oh shit, I'm worried 'cos I had a lot of beers last night and now I look cack!' When people rush to us, I think they MUST think we look dreadful. It's really odd – I really honestly have no idea how or where we fit in."

"There's part of me, really, that's a show-off, there must be": Robert Smith on stage in Brazil, March 1987

MICHAEL PUTLAND / GETTY

**TO SOME, THE** Cure are still Shelleyan victims of their own sensitivity, romantics heroically wounded out there in the big, harsh world. In other words, gloriously miserable bastards.

"Oh, that never goes away," says Lol. "But what probably distinguishes us from bands who might be our contemporaries is that we reached a point where we realised that you can think about things so much, you end up destroying yourself. Perhaps the way we work now is a bit more… well, not cynical – cynicism is personified by The Smiths, who I hate.

"We are more… fatalistic. We may seem flippant on the single, but I think anybody who liked us for the other, deeper side will still like us. It's still there – you don't really change that way of thinking. Maybe it's an age thing; you can say to yourself, 'Well, I can be angst-ridden and tortured about it, or I can get on with it and find some humour in it.' I think that's what's happened to us – we don't take ourselves so seriously because there aren't that many things completely serious in the world."

"It still feels the same as it did in the beginning, when we were just playing little clubs," says Porl. "It's bigger now, but the fact that we can still go up there and laugh about it is important. I think people feel that, people can *understand* if you mean it rather than just playing for effect or because you think you're going to sell a lot of records."

"If I was 15 again," says Lol, "we'd be my favourite band, because we reflect that certain frame of mind you have when you're younger and you suddenly start to think about things in a certain way. We're probably a lot of young people's older brothers in some way. We still don't have any reasons or answers 10 years on, but at least we can be a bit more lucid about the questions. That's what I was like when I was younger – in my room, listening to music or reading a book and thinking, 'I wish I'd written that.'

"Maybe we do that something for people because we've all come through our particular traumas or whatever that have made the songs and now we've come to reflect on it, giving back to other people what we've felt about things and how you can express yourself. Maybe we're a bit more objective. I mean, the album reminds me of when I was 15 and I went to school and then the summer holidays come and I went to France for the first time, and then I came back – it's a catalogue of things like that. When I listen to it, I take it as a little diary of the things I went through in the nine months it took to make it. Sometimes I think a lot of it is us pretending to be younger."

I wondered, with the album being so diverse, whether Robert found himself *acting* now, adopting personas to suit each song?

"I definitely adopt a persona for the more up, wayward ones, but when we're doing the slow, quieter ones, I'm much the same as I've always been. I mean, there doesn't have to be any emotion in 'Hot Hot Hot' or 'Why Can't I Be You?', because there's no emotion in the lyrics, but I would never allow us to release a song that had emotion in the words and was interpreted like, say, Paul Young would… A complete waste of time. If I'm not in the mood, I may as well just hold the song over until, or *if*, I ever get round to feeling like that.

"I mean, obviously, I feel less like that the more I go on. I feel less despondent because there's less to feel despondent about, both in the »

way we're now being appreciated and also in my personal life. I threw away the mantle of professional moaner a long time ago. If there'd been no sad songs on the album, it wouldn't have upset me."

It must be said, after a decade, The Cure is an obscenely *happy* group, new and old, mature and excited. Smith has gathered a gang around him, a comfy working environment of camaraderie which allows him to relax as the undisputed leader. And he protects it sometimes like it's the most precious thing in his world.

"I'm protective of the group in one sense, as an *idea*," he agrees. "I always have been, but that's because I want it to continue for as long as I want it to. I resent unfounded criticism, but then at the same time I've been untouched by it for years because of the alternatives I'm facing. If there were things I seriously thought were far better than what I was doing, if I felt inferior to my peers, my contemporaries, I would get bitter, but I don't.

"I do feel like a dad, though, sometimes… Well, more like a mother hen, I suppose. It's a responsibility I've always accepted. I think I should be protective of the others, because they put so much trust in me and they're being seen in a light that I mainly dictate.

"I take a lot of stick, but I get an enormous amount of accolades also. That's the position I'm in and I wouldn't change it. I don't think the others would swap with me either. I'm not hurt by jibes as much as the others are. I'm much thicker skinned, despite what people think. I'm upset by really funny things, not by being fat, for example."

Really? What upsets you?

"Vague things. The first few days I was in the castle, I was upset by taking this year out – y'know, 'What am I doing with it?' It's like having a child – post-record depression, thinking, 'Well, now we're going back out to play it.' For a time I was thinking we were back again in that inevitable cycle, like we were after *Head On The Door*."

According to Lol: "The reason for The Cure is not a purely musical one, it's more a feeling about *why* you want to do something. *Why* you want to make music. It has to be personality compatible. It's not down to technical musicianship. Among the five of us there is a genuine *excitement* about doing things. It started off 10 years ago and it's come around again with Porl and Simon being back. It's fresh without ever needing to think about it."

"The Cure has been several groups," says Robert. "It's becoming unique with the reintroduction of people. It's really weird, but it's like this particular lineup has been inevitable for years, with the exception of Boris, but I can't imagine him not being here now. The way he fits in and contributes towards the atmosphere of the group is immeasurable.

"I wrote *Head On The Door* on my own at home and we interpreted it like an orchestra would, but with this album I insisted that the others gave me a cassette of music and I got six or seven songs from each one. Even Boris made a tape of interesting drum patterns, which I appreciated because I didn't expect to get anything from him and it just showed that *everyone* wanted to be really involved in it.

"They gave me all the cassettes early last summer when we started doing demos at Beethoven in London. I put all the tapes on and everyone listened to them cold and I didn't say whose was whose and no one was allowed to comment on their own stuff. We gave each a score out of 20 and commented and, at the end, we'd listened to 60 pieces of music and compared notes. We then took the ones that were most immediately impressive, put them on two cassettes and went into John Costa's studio in Provence.

"We demoed there for two weeks – it was really good fun, they had a football pitch and we played the locals every day – and then we drove across to Mirabelle where we recorded at least a song a day, sometimes two. Most of them were first takes, almost jamming the songs to get the feel right. We spent a couple of hours playing each song so we became familiar with it and then recorded it in one go and it worked! It was a delight to record, a joy."

I don't suppose that's got anything to do with the studio having its own vineyards?

"Oh, that and the fact that I had loads of words. Usually I get really stuck, but I had words for 23 songs and I think they're easily the best I've ever written. I astounded myself. I wrote the songs the way I wrote 'The Walk'. I had a mood for each song and I sifted back through what I'd already done, and a couple of songs even refer to incidents I've already written songs about but they actually capture the spirit of them far more.

"'How Beautiful You Are' owes a lot to a Baudelaire one-page short story which had such a good idea in it. It's about how you think you're really close to somebody, that you think the same way and enjoy the same things, but suddenly an incident will happen which makes you realise the person thinks a completely way about things that you think are really important and yet you can still get on with them really well.

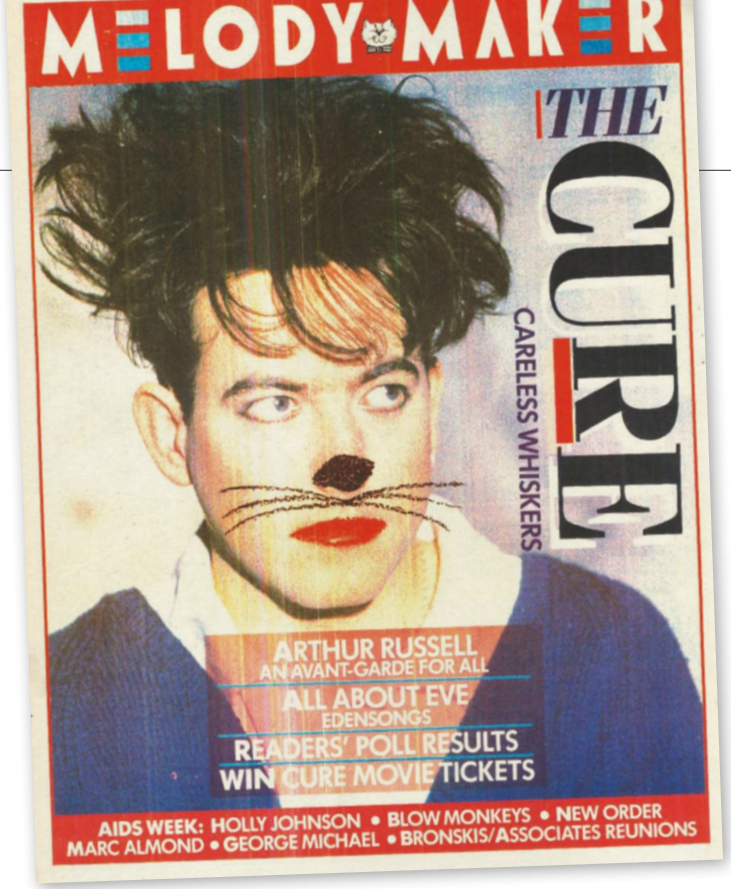
"No one really knows anyone else, or really loves anyone else in the purest sense of the word, because it is utterly impossible. If you did, it would just be yourself.

"Those sort of ideas, taking specifics like that and writing songs about them, was far more challenging for me than writing 'I'm not feeling very well' sort of songs. It's the easy way out to write about mood, but once you pin yourself down, it's kind of criticism because you're looking at something really hard to get the essence from it.

"Then again, 'Hot Hot Hot' is almost like a Louis Armstrong record, which I would never have tried before. On *The Top*, I started trying to change my voice to give different expressions, which I'd have considered sacrilegious before. Most people that you hear in pop change their voices to make them more acceptable, nicer, more

Robert Smith: "I threw off the mantle of professional moaner a long time ago"

PAUL NATKIN / GETTY




American or whatever. Very few singers will try to become more difficult or *worse*. But again, I thought, 'Why not?'"

Boris also felt different about doing *Kiss Me Kiss Me Kiss Me* to doing *Head On The Door*.

"I didn't particularly like the way I played on *Head*. I played parts that were set down, whereas with this album I really thought out all the parts. It was more of a group effort. It gave me the chance to express my own personality within the group."

"I'm 100 per cent satisfied with the group," says Simon, "and without putting too much emphasis on it, I think this album now is perfect."

It's well known that Robert has always treated criticism of self-indulgence as accolades, as if there couldn't possibly be any other sane way of going about things, but surely the hacks will have a field day with *Kiss Me* being a double.

"The main doubt, a stupid one, was the precedent set by other people's double albums. There are so few in the history of pop that have worked – a couple of Beatles albums, the Prince album… I think *Ummagumma* was worthwhile, and Porl maintains that a Led Zeppelin album was too…"

What makes you think this one works?

"Because it's two good single albums for less than the cost of two single albums. Why buy the new Cure album and the new Echo And The Bunnymen album when you can buy two Cure albums for less? It wouldn't have been a double if I thought we couldn't get away with it. But you could play any of these songs on the radio and say it's from the new Cure LP – there's not a weak song on it. A good five songs on *Head On The Door* would struggle to get on this album. I'm really pleased with the strength of it all the way through."

"Honestly, I think it's a cracker," Simon insists. "It's like a mix between *Pornography* and *Head On The Door* – the best elements of both. It works really well because one moment you're elated and the next you're flung into despair."

> "I should be protective of the others, they put so much trust in me"

**PERVERSELY ENOUGH, IN** direct opposition to the unwritten law which seems to govern the creative careers of most groups, The Cure haven't grown more muso and mystical and lost for direction. On the contrary, they've grown more tactile, more huggable, more sexy, more poppy. They've created their own environment instead of falling foul of fashion, and any track from *Kiss Me* could conceivably be a single, even the groovy, druggy-sounding seven-minute wonders.

"There's a rational explanation for it," according to Robert. "It's just how I want the group to be. I honestly don't think there's anything The Cure couldn't do now."

Hence "Hot Hot Hot!!!", a deliberate and gleeful tacky Chic rip-off, topped off spiffingly by Robert's drunken funk guitar and leering howl on "Hey You!!!", a ransacking of 'The Man From UNCLE Theme' bludgeoned by wild sax courtesy of some geezer he found blowing with a cabaret band in a grotty American bar at Compass Point.

"I would never have dreamed of doing something like that a few years ago, but I think I was a bit more precious about what we were doing then. Now I think, 'If it doesn't work, it doesn't matter.'"

"We could, if we didn't bother about it, make an album of Cure cliches," says Lol, "and there'd by an audience for it. But you have to remember that anyone who hears or sees you, does so on face value. Maybe it is a bit confusing sometimes when we change it round, but I think that's more honest, trying to scrape a few raw nerves."

"If we'd done this album three or four years ago, people who were trying to sell the records would have moaned because I wasn't capitalising on an image, which we still retain," says Robert. "In France, there's an inordinate amount of people who arrive at the concerts dressed in black with a certain look despite the fact that I *never* wear black. I've never liked wearing it – I don't think there's ever been a photo of me wearing a black top, so it's a myth that's arisen.

"Not capitalising on the past would have been seen as being a dumb move, but that went by the wayside a long time ago. It's more difficult now trying to escape the quirky corner, like 'Here comes The Cure, that funny bloke with the hair'. That's why I cut it when we went to America, to be far more sullen and aggressive than people expected. It was calculated and crucial, because I didn't want to end up in *Star Hits*. Once I start seeing adjectives like 'cuddly', I think it's going to fuck what we're going to do next time round.

"It's not that I ever actually spend real time thinking about it, I never sit down and plan what the group is going to do next, but when we're involved in something, I always consider what effect it's going to have on what we do next and what effect it will have on me, the way it will bounce back, the way I'm going to be seen. Ultimately, I'm an easy target, and if I'm hit too many times, the group suffers. It doesn't matter if Lol looks 100 years old, we can still do what we want, but if there are too many photos of me looking fat, we're a fat group. It's horribly unfair, but I had to accept it a long time ago.

"It's only since my methods have been proven, since we pulled it off, that people will accept it. Now they'll accept anything I say or do in regard to The Cure, because they think I'm going to be right, as I generally have been. It comes as no surprise to me as I've always thought the first head on the block is mine. If I fuck it, Polydor aren't going to cry.

"It has always been the intention that I should dictate to the group and myself when it all ends, not that it should happen through mismanagement or me miscalculating."

"You build up some idea of yourself and then knock it all down again," says Lol. "That makes it all the more exciting. If we were looked at by another planet, it would be hilarious. You always think, 'I will think about the next year, or the year after that', but music is not like that. Music goes on forever. It makes people feel one way or the other all the time, so if you change and let it be free, then it will always go on."

Lol, as you've gathered, has taken a drink. Simon says, "I think this video will be the best we've ever done… a bit like the album. Everything we've done feels as if it's been leading towards this and, hopefully, by the time we do something else, we'll be feeling the same."

Robert agrees. "I love it. I'll endure any pain to see that gets through. Any vestiges of reality that surround the group, any accusations of serious musicianship that could be levelled on us, will be shattered."

Back on the set, the band struggle through some cardiac-inducing choreography and Tim Pope's flipping his lid. "This is it! The video I've always wanted to make. The Cure *dancing*! I can't believe I'm seeing this. They're *finished*!"

"Nonsense," says Robert. "We were *tight*!" We were… Five Star!" *Steve Sutherland* •

Swagger and sweat: Guns N' Roses at the Marquee

MARQUEE LONDON
LIVE!
JUNE 19

# Instinct rather than tradition

**MM JUN 27** A new hard rock band from California, Guns N' Roses, upset London's trad metallers.

**THEY REFERRED TO** gals as "chicks" so, of course, they deserve to die like dogs, but there was enough about the stalking swagger and grinning sweat of Guns N' Roses during their London debut to convince that their tiny controversy hasn't all been hype.

They're alien, they can all hang a fag like Bogart, sheet-metal screecher Axl Rose has affected a rather winning Neanderthal lumber, they're more tattoo than flesh and, if there are *degrees* of sexism, theirs is marginally less absurd than their lingering forebears considering their lithe absence of beer-guts, beards and wrinkles. At least in reclaiming heavy rock from the bottle and male menopause and reintroducing it to dizzy youth and dust, you can imagine Guns N' Roses actually doing all the screwing their songs claim – something Ozzy or Coverdale can doubtless barely *remember*.

**Sheet-metal screecher Axl Rose has affected a rather winning Neanderthal lumber**

Indeed, it may well have been the female following – steeped, it seems, in some groupie's fantasy circa '74 judging by the predominance of lurex slacks, fake leather, panda eyeliner and perfect curls – that so disturbed the porcine HM contingent herded near the back muttering that "the Yankee crap" wasn't heavy enough.

Others, evidently, were disappointed by what they claimed was a lack of glamour, and there was much bemoaning poor Hanoi Rocks who, apparently, did it bolder and better and far more beautiful a few years back. But that's Guns N' Roses' sole trump card – their timing is immaculate, so the look and action and sound (weak AC/DC) may be the same but the era is generous not to insist their every gesture be pickled in irony.

Certainly Guns N' Roses aren't an explosion in the quarry of rock, but neither are they a chip off the old block – they appear to follow instinct rather than tradition or style, and that such throwbacks have been thrown up at the forefront in '87 isn't so surprising since the upsurge of extreme black music has deemed the current pop currency be loud and proud and egocentric.

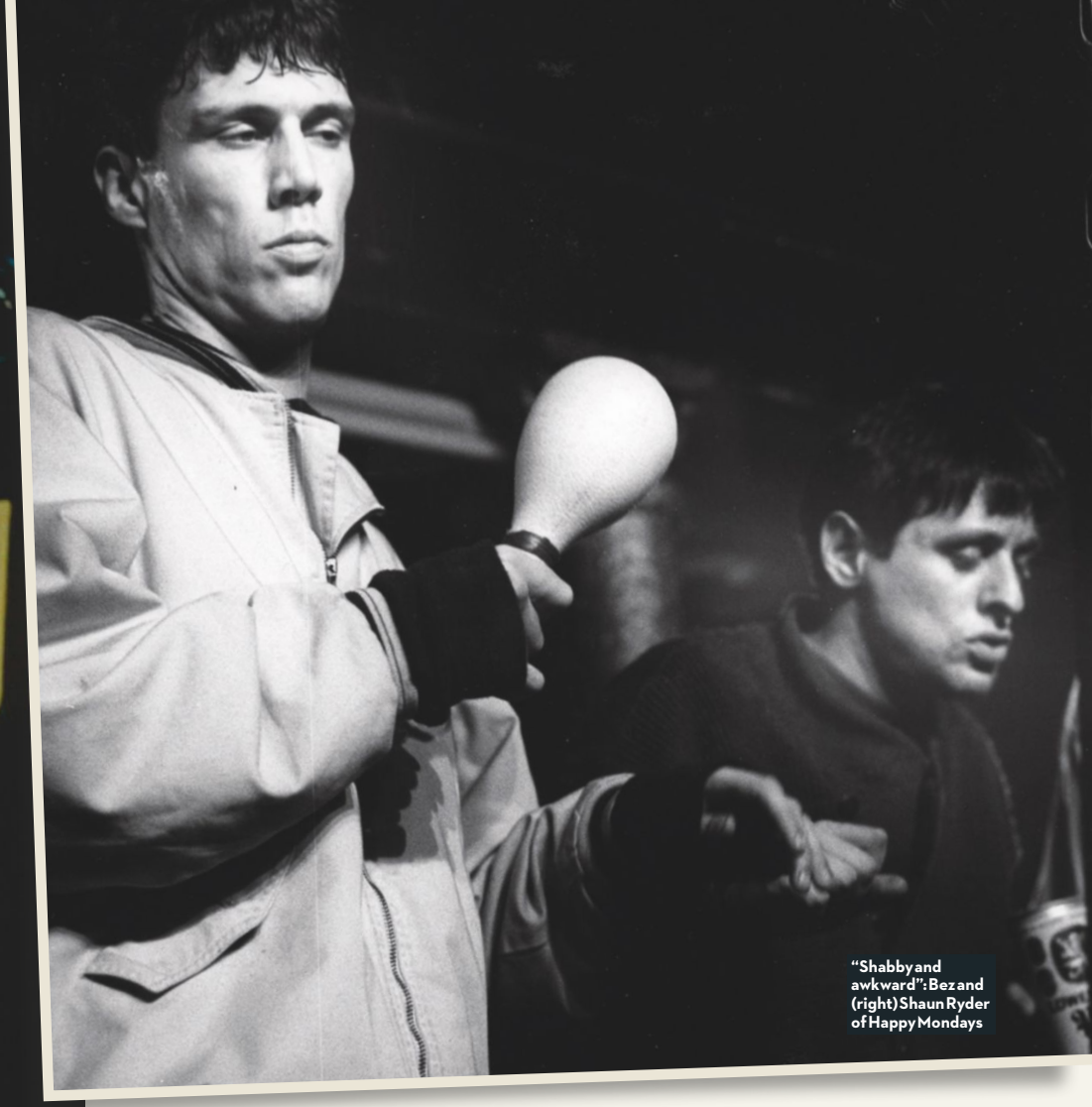
But, for all their noise, when the static dissipates, nothing granite remains.

PETER BROOKER / REX FEATURES

All their stuff, even the single, "It's So Easy", lacks anything monumental – a hook or riff or, dammit, a *song* – though "Night Train" almost got by on Stonesy bluster alone.

Significant, then, that Guns N' Roses' best-received number all night was Dylan's "Knockin' On Heaven's Door". But more significant still was surely the fact that the Marquee crowd largely loathed them. They must be doing something right.

*Steve Sutherland*



"Shabby and awkward": Bez and (right) Shaun Ryder of Happy Mondays

# An offhand listlessness

**MM MAY 2** Happy Mondays fail to recreate their funk-rock alchemy.

THE ROCK GARDEN LONDON
LIVE!
APRIL 23

**HAPPY MONDAYS IS** where the repetition-repetition-repetition of post-Velvets jangle-drone meets the repetition-repetition-repetition of '70s funk. Imagine a cross between the Blue Orchids and Hamilton Bohannon, The Fall and The Fatback Band, James and JB. The wah-wah on "Freaky Dancin'" cues memories of both The Stooges' "Ann" and Isaac Hayes' "Shaft" simultaneously. I'd like them to take this hybrid further still, bring in a clavinet and some John Cale viola.

What Happy Mondays do (quite unintentionally, I'm sure) is take the steamy stupor of the dancefloor and, through some cryogenic process of alchemy, create an unearthly frost-funk; a sound that seems newborn and yet ancient as a fossil. With its granite basslines and guitars that twinkle like stalactites and icicles, it's a sound that's streaming with glistening rivulets of the stuff we rock critics call "magic", when we're at a loss for words.

Shaun Ryder is like a goblin in the midst of this enchanted ice palace, unsavoury, snarling like a hobo – you can practically see the flecks of spittle in the corners of his mouth.

However, as a good reporter, I feel duty-bound to tell you that this was not, in fact, a great gig. Happy Mondays lumbered when they should have shimmered. The burnished precision of Cale's production was traded in for a coarse and sloppy tumult. The band seemed to apply themselves to the task in hand with an offhand listlessness. The percussionist's dancing was a perfect representation of their stiff untogetherness.

**The burnished precision of John Cale's production was traded in for sloppy tumult**

It was not groovy. It was not dreamy. Happy Mondays came across as shabby and awkward, when they should have come across as grave and intense apostles of the cryptic beauty that has somehow come into their possession. Buy the record, and keep your fingers crossed for next time.

*Simon Reynolds*

MIKE MORTON

# "I'm being hailed as an anti-Christ"

**So it goes for 23-year-old GEORGE MICHAEL. In the UK, he's a monogamy-promoting, mature star, while the US assumes he's still in Wham!. Will public perception catch him before the press does? "People think I'm an arsehole," he says. "It's not difficult to give them a pleasant surprise."**

— NME JUNE 20 —

**JUST THREE YEARS** ago, the Frankie Goes To Hollywood single "Relax" was banned by the BBC on the grounds that its explicit sexual content rendered it unsuitable for broadcast on a national TV or radio channel. Predictably enough, the ensuing controversy helped the record to ease comfortably into the No 1 spot on British and international charts.

Yet if you've turned on your television during peak viewing hours in the last week or two you may have found yourself surprised to hear the same offending Frankie track in a new context. Forget that it was ever thought too hot for your ears – now it helps to hawk suntan oil, with a bronzed hunk applying the product in question to his girlfriend's hind quarters.

To George Michael, suntanned beyond any telly-ad director's wildest dreams, this anomaly is as a red rag to a bull. George's current single, "I Want Your Sex", and its accompanying video, have both been "blacklisted" – broadcasting networks have at least wised up to the fact that the word "banned" acts as a positive marketing aid – by both the BBC and independent channels. As a result, of course, he's languishing in Frankie territory atop world charts.

"I mean, if *I* was rubbing oil into my girlfriend's arse in my video there might be something to talk about," he fumes over a Lucozade, before slotting the VHS in question into a conveniently placed recorder. »

MARTYN GOODACRE / REX FEATURES

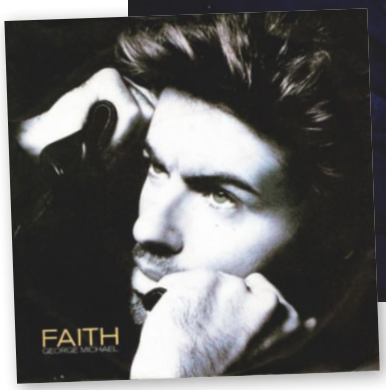
**"I think people are going to find this incredibly tame": George Michael filming the video for his soon-to-be-blacklisted single "I Want Your Sex"**

"After all that's been written, I think people are going to find this incredibly tame."

And so, when George's decision to underwrite part of the production costs enables it to be sold nationally from next week for something just above the cost of a 12-inch single, they are. It may begin with the vision of Kathy Jueng's cami-clad rear retreating from camera and it may end, several satin sheets later, with the words "Explore Monogamy" being written across her back in lipstick, but corrupt the nation's youth it will not.

That doesn't mean I'm rushing to the defence of the George Michael nude-frolic-sex-shocker or the record it's promoting. For a start, if this world were turned upside down and records were banned when they proved to be poor reflections of their maker's talent, then "I Want Your Sex" would find the boy from Bushey in serious trouble – it's a largely uninspired slice of soft-core funk, the sort of thing Prince can do so much better, and gives no hint of the pop sensibility that brought us near-perfect tracks like "Careless Whisper" and "Everything She Wants". And then there's the blatant desire-me narcissism of George's presentation – he's got it all of course, but a little modesty and discretion might suit him better.

Yet if the George of "I Want Your Sex" comes on a bit of a tart, at least he's a tart with a heart. Despite the provocative wrappings, he's got more than just one thing on his mind… From the depths of the upholstery in his London hotel suite he explains: "The single has plenty to do with sex but it was absolutely nothing to do with promiscuity. I feel that there's a horrible atmosphere surrounding sex at the moment, post Aids, which needs to be calmed down and redirected. The sense of fear had got to be made more specific, and directed at promiscuity."




To elaborate, he points out that he, as a show-business figure based in London, is fortunate enough to be able to say he knows no one personally who has died of Aids.

"That's just me, but I know it's out there and I know how huge it is. But if I'm a young kid living somewhere in suburbia it's going to seem far more remote, and I'm not going to feel that frightened of it. People will be bombarding me with all these instructions not to have sex, but I'm going to be wondering why on earth not. Where's the danger?

Parental overreaction and calls for a return to Victorian values, whatever they are, won't help either and are, he reasons, unrealistic. The Michael method is to shift the emphasis from abstinence or safe sex to a celebration of the good, old-fashioned one-on-one.

"And," says George, shifting forward to stress his point, "if you're going to try and redefine sex and make monogamy attractive again, it's got to be seen as something that's sexy. That is the point of a single. I can't think of a better question for a 12- or 13-year-old to be asking their parents than 'What's monogamy?'"

**THAT SAID, PUTTING** your message in such a guaranteed-to-titillate package as "I Want Your Sex" could be seen as self-defeating. It was nothing if not predictable that the BBC would refuse to play the record during peak time and that the tabloids would relish the opportunity to get into a froth about it. Neither result helps get teenagers excited about the possibilities of long-standing, faithful relationships. Maybe "I Want Your Sex (But In The Context Of A Serious Relationship)" or "I Want Your Sex (And I've Got An Indefinite Supply Of Condoms)" would have been more helpful working titles?

Or maybe the whole thing has been a carefully thought-out marketing strategy to ensure maximum sales for an otherwise lacklustre single? After all, banned records have a pretty successful history when you think about it, haven't they?

"Yeah, they have," admits George, "but then think about the sales pattern my records usually have. Because of my grassroots following, they automatically go in very high and then tend to go down quickly, whereas most banned records build slowly and stay in the charts longer. In Britain, this single went in at four, and in a couple of weeks it'll be old news.

"Now, in America it's different. In some parts of the country I'm being hailed as an anti-Christ, which I think is hysterical, but there are no overall ruling bodies like the IBA to bring in a ban, and the record is being played a lot. So there it's true that the controversy is actually helping sales. But I think it should be known that we are the only country in the world to have banned it."

"I've always maintained that being successful isn't a right-wing act in itself": George Michael posed in London, April 2, 1987

Maybe. But given the BBC's habitual jitters about S-E-X, it's none too surprising, is it?

"Well perhaps not," he allows, "but I really didn't expect the IBA ban. I can't be specific here, but there's a fair amount of evidence to conclude that somebody – we know who but can't say – from the BBC raised the matter at the IBA to encourage them to ban it as well, so it wasn't just a one-network thing. Now, I think that's totally out of order. I'm sure Capital wouldn't have had any problem playing it, and neither would a lot of similar stations up and down the country.

"So, the situation in Britain isn't what I was expecting and isn't what I wanted. I don't see how the record can go to No 1 now. You get your initial sales from that section of the pubic that always buys your records; you get a few people buying it because of the controversy, but not that many; and after that you need people to hear the record and like it enough to buy it. Nobody's hearing it – simple as that."

Unless you tune in after nine at night, of course.

"I don't even know about that," says George. "If I can't be bothered to listen to the radio after nine to see if they're playing my record, I don't see why anybody else should."

If what George says about his lyrical intent on "I Want Your Sex" is true, then the collective bans on both the single and the video have helped it to backfire in spectacular fashion. The dancefloor crushes and clinches it will inspire will have nothing at all to do with the desire for a monogamous partnership. Like "Lady Marmalade" a decade ago, it'll be remembered for just one line – and this time round it's in English. Poor George.

But having commiserated with him, wouldn't he himself be a bit sceptical about the whole thing if it were another artist up there on screen chanting about sex and flashing the all-over suntan from amid a tangle of beach clothes? Might he not, at the very least, think that they fancied themselves a bit too much?

"Yeah, but I wouldn't think it was bad," says George, who sometimes seems to be courting global assurance that he's as gorgeous as he thinks he is. "I don't think there's anything wrong in marketing yourself sexually at all. People are sometimes uncomfortable when they see men doing it,

MICHAEL PUTLAND / GETTY

but part of what makes certain men stars is the way they promote themselves in the manner that women do all the time.

"Women are allowed to project sexuality as part of their personalities; it's seen as something beautiful. If a guy does it, on a day-to-day level, there's normally a 'medallion-man' type of reaction, but up on screen it's more acceptable. If you do it well, do it with a certain conviction, I think it can be very appealing. In my case, people don't seem to have found it a turn-off."

Britain's most famous combination of teeth and tan and stubble, the undeniably handsome George Michael, shifts in his seat and contemplates the silver-tipped toes of his boots. Isn't it a bit off-putting for people meeting him for the first time though, I ask, remembering the moment earlier on when he walked in the room to meet me looking as if he'd just stepped out of a fashion plate.

"Nah," he says easily. "It's not a problem in real life. People think I'm going to be such an arsehole that it's not difficult to give them a pleasant surprise. All I have to do is be myself. Even though that may not be the most wonderful person in the world, it's a hell of a lot better than the person they're expecting to meet."

> "It's horrible to have to admit that the press has helped me"

**IF THE SCANDALMONGERING** potential of "I Want Your Sex" has had them salivating over their word processors down at Wapping for days on end, it's just the latest chapter in a strange and enduring symbiotic relationship between George Michael and the tabloid press. Symbiotic because George is at least honest and far-sighted enough to admit that he has benefitted in one way from the obsessive and intrusive attention that has been lavished on him by the scumbags of the right-wing tabloids.

"It's a fickle market for artists who begin by being aimed at young kids," he says. "I've always taken that for granted, but I don't think most people appreciate what a huge transition has to be made to cross successfully to an older audience. I got over the barrier partially, it has to be said, with the help of those horrible tabloids, simply through the fact they forced people to be aware that I had changed physically, if not musically, by putting me on the front pages all the time. In America, where there isn't that same press exposure, I'm still viewed as part of the Wham! phenomenon.

"That ghost has yet to be buried. It's horrible to have to admit that the press has helped me in any way, but it's true."

In that case it's more than you deserve in recompense, George, because the demon bastards of Fleet Street and points east have certainly had their money's worth out of you. You're already suing *The Sun* for the totally fictitious story that you were sick over a girl companion in a nightclub and had to be thrown out for being abusive. Now everyone's shouting the odds about the big gay exposé they're supposed to have lined up on you. How do you live with that pressure?

"For six months now I've been hearing those rumours," says George, suddenly the most serious 23-year-old in Britain. "I've got a feeling that they put the rumours out there themselves, in the hope that someone will be encouraged to come forward with something; hence all the stuff about massive figures they're prepared to pay. But the fact is that there's nothing out there. I'm not a person with a huge past. Second, it's just not the case that there are loads of people waiting to crawl out of the woodwork and spill the beans on me.

"Given that that's the case, I'm surprised they haven't introduced a total fiction. I promise you that all they could possibly get is what they've had before, and it wouldn't be news to have some girl come forward and say that she slept with me and that I was nasty to her.

"They don't want that anyway. They're looking for a guy to do that, and it's just not there, simple as that. For all the rumours and shit about myself that I've heard around London these past five years, I know what I've done. I know what my life's been like. There were times in the past, as I've said before, when I wasn't particularly selective, but in the past three years all I've been involved in are two successive and pretty much monogamous relationships."

That's an extraordinary thing for a 23-year-old to have to declare publicly, of course. How many 23-year-old *Sun* readers could say the same, or would be prepared to? But still the hypocrisy continues, and the circulation war is won on lies and innuendo. What if they do resort to fiction?

"I've already decided that if *The Sun*, the *Mirror* or whoever do print something really vile about me, I won't fight them. I won't allow them to be part of my life like that. I don't talk to them, I haven't done for years, but they're so vile, so evil, that I cannot allow them to intrude on me in any way other than is absolutely necessary.

"I realise that because they follow me around all the time they keep me in the public eye, and I can't pretend I'm not glad about that. At one time I thought, 'Fuck it, I can do without them', but now I actually concede that they're one of the reasons that I'm still here in this position. To that extent, I have to be aware of what they're saying about me, but otherwise they don't exist for me.

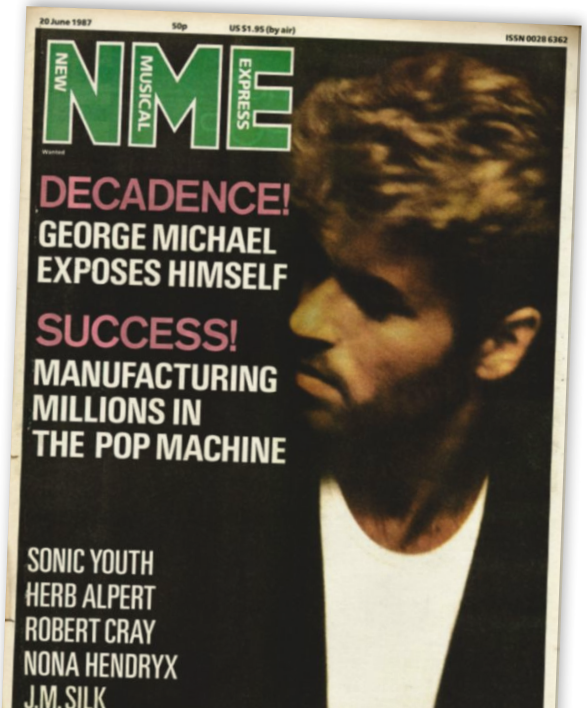
"If *The Sun* decides to run a story tomorrow saying I'm a child molester, I'm not going to spend four weeks in court fighting them when the case comes up in 18 months' time. You'll be put through it on the front pages, day by day, inch by inch, for as long as it lasts, and in the end the public won't even remember who was in the right. All they'll remember is the scandal. So what's the point of dealing with an amoral entity purely on a point of principle?"

And, of course, if it's not one thing it's another. Avoid being pasted for a sex scandal and you'll have people writing you off as a money-grabbing Tory upstart simply on the basis of your dental work and your suntan, let alone for the opium-of-the-masses of your cheery pop tunes…

"I honestly think my music would have been the same in any decade," says George with a shrug. "I feel sure I would have written along the same mainstream lines. But the way the music has fallen so neatly in step with people's political aspirations is almost frightening.

"That's not to say I'm in step too, though. As a person, I feel I'm out of sync with things. I've always maintained that being successful isn't a right-wing act in itself – I don't think there's anything wrong with wanting huge amounts of success for yourself in terms of what you do, but I find it sad that it becomes lumped in with that whole Thatcherist emphasis on money. I never make decisions just for monetary reasons. I pride myself on not doing things simply to further my career.

"I'm the only one of that whole band of 1984 stars who hasn't done a year out of the country for tax reasons. And what does that mean? It means that I'll have given more money to the Thatcher government than any of those other people."




It's a hard row to hoe, it's true, George, but then here you are, all things bright and beautiful, 23 going on ageless, a star for as long as you want to be. Someone's looking out for you.

"Yeah. I do take credit for my career. I'm not going to say it's all been down to luck, but certain things do make me think that someone up there's been guiding it somehow…"

Shame they didn't take the same care with Andrew, huh?

"Oh, I don't know," grins George. "He's recording in Nassau at the moment. He's not exactly suffering either."

When the black-clad body relaxes back into the cushions and the face breaks into its most dazzling smile, it's almost possible to believe that being George Michael is as much fun as it ought to be. *Alan Jackson* •

# "Music for human beings"

**HÜSKER DÜ are now an important band. But how can they reach more people? "I don't think you associate a clothing style or a lifestyle with what we do," explains Bob Mould. "In that sense we're not exclusive to anyone, we don't exclude."**

— MM JUNE 27 —

**IN ATLANTA, GEORGIA,** The Replacements play me a tape of Hüsker Dü's live appearance on *The Joan Rivers Show*. It's more than a little mindblowing. The band unleash the great grey gust that is "Could You Be The One", then troop over for a "chat" with the lady herself.

It's one of the most embarrassing pieces of television I've ever seen. Rivers is clearly terrified of the band, doesn't know how to place or approach them, stammers out something to the effect that they used to be kind of radical and underground, but now aren't quite so radical and underground, isn't that so?

What's unnerving her is that the band aren't selling themselves on any level, either as outrage or as light entertainment, aren't making anything of this opportunity to project themselves. They're polite, awkward, somehow not-there. It's not so much that they're deliberately aloof as that they're irretrievably apart. Rivers asks a question and I think she's saying, "Which one of you is the wild member of the group and which is the commie one?" – turns out she said "calming". Then they traipse off again, to play "She's A Woman", having left an irreparable crease in the sleek fabric of the show.

It made me wonder whether a group like Hüsker Dü can interact with this thing, pop. The Smiths, at least, make a drama of their exile – their anti-glamour can be consumed as glamour.

But Hüsker Dü refuse to act up – the "outrage" they perpetrated on Joan Rivers was of an altogether quieter, less ostentatious order – they didn't play »

PAUL NATKIN / GETTYW

October 10, 1987: Hüsker Dü – (l–r) Greg Norton, Grant Hart and Bob Mould – at the Vic Theatre in Chicago

up to the role of Misfit, they just failed to connect, to communicate on Pop's terms at all – an eloquent incoherence. How, then, do they cope with things like videos?

Grant Hart: "The videos are of straight performances of the songs. Seeing as none of our songs are particularly etched in fantasy, they're best portrayed naturalistically."

Like the other American thinking rock bands I've encountered (Throwing Muses and The Replacements), Hüsker Dü loathe the exigencies of presentation and marketing, have a chronic fear of anything that suggests contrivance. American rock has never seen "image" and "packaging" as a means of expression in the way that much British rock has.

Perhaps this is because American daily life is more heavily saturated with showbiz glitz and advertising pizazz than British life, and so it seems more urgent to escape the all-pervasive environment of kitsch, escape from the escapist, into the authentic, the "real". Probably, it has a lot to do with the absence in America of the art school/art rock interface that's has been so hugely important in British pop history.

Either way, American rock (outside New York) has no notion of glamour as something you can radicalise: Throwing Muses will turn up for photo sessions in their tattiest, most everyday clothes, The Replacements will refuse to throw shapes for the camera and Hüsker Dü will resist anything in the way of video presentation that's redolent of advertising and its manipulation of the consumer.

Bob Mould: "The problem with videos is that, before they existed, you'd make up your own story, your own mental pictures, to go with a song. That's what music's for – attaching your own meanings to."

Somewhere along the way, pop ceased to be something that gave people a heightened sense of their own agency, and became something that programmed desires. What Hüsker Dü hate above all is when things get fixed – they like to leave things open, in a flux. Maybe they'd get on better if they did give people one easy handle, if they weren't so keen to leave things up to people's imagination. Maybe the only way to get a hit is to work from the premise that most people's imaginations are enfeebled, through underuse. As it is, they're not even let near those kind of people.

Bob: "Our videos don't get heavy rotation. Our records get played on college radio and on the progressive commercial radio stations. Whereas all the people in here (*gestures at Billboard*) get played several times a day on every radio station in America."

Ah, *Billboard* – whenever I look at magazines like *Billboard* or *Music Week*, it does my head in: I think of all the things that music means to me – dissension, speculation, complex pleasures, never-never dreams, the criss-cross currents of making sacred and sacrilege – and then look at how these people discuss pop – crossover between different radio sectors, aggressive marketing, instore promotion… Who knows which kind of talk is more out of touch with the "reality" of pop?

"Well, yes, it all depends on whether your conception of success is related to the outside world or to your own mind. With us it's the latter, so every song is a 'hit'."

Quite. What is a "hit" these days? Something that wreaks havoc in the private lives of a few people, or something that resounds widely and weakly across the surfaces of the globe? We're back with Stubbs' dichotomy between the small and significant and "huge insignificances" like Moyet or Curiosity [Killed The Cat]. Two rival definitions of impact – purity of vision or breadth of effect.

All I know is that Hüsker Dü hit me – this feels like the elusive "perfect pop", the swoon and the surge. In one sense (sales) Hüsker Dü are a "small" band – in every other sense they are massive – in the scale and reach of their music, in the way they give a grandeur to mundane tribulations and quandaries – a musical equivalent of "the pathetic fallacy" (thunder and lightning as the dramatic externalisation of inner turmoil).

What is it about this "perfect pop" that dooms it to be as distant from real '80s pop as the moon? That the music is too imposing, while the band, as individuals, are too self-effacing, hiding behind the noise? That the music's too violent, while the feelings that inspire it are too sensitive? That the songs deal with the loose ends of life but refuse to tie things up satisfactorily, instead confronting the listener again and again with the insoluble?

> "I don't see many people trying to be as honest as we are"

**ALL THESE THINGS** distance Hüsker Dü from today's secular pop, with its twin poles of levity and sentimentality. But there are more material reasons why they don't belong. The very fabric of their sound has no place in pop '87, a blizzard that makes no appeal to the dancing body, but dances in the head.

Move in close and you see activity too furious for pop – flurry-hurry chords, febrile drumming. Step back 10 paces and you can take in the sweep and curve of the cloud shapes stirred up by the by the frenzy. Only AR Kane come close as sublime choreographers of harmonic haze. The stricken voices, the almost unbearable candour of their bewilderment and desolation, jar with pop's soul-derived universal voice of self-possession and narcissism.

"Ice Cold Ice", the fabulous new single off the *Warehouse* double, says it all – the chill of awe instead of the fire of passion, frost instead of flesh, the ghost of folk instead of the residue of R&B. Pop '87's aerobic humanism can't take on this kind of enchantment.

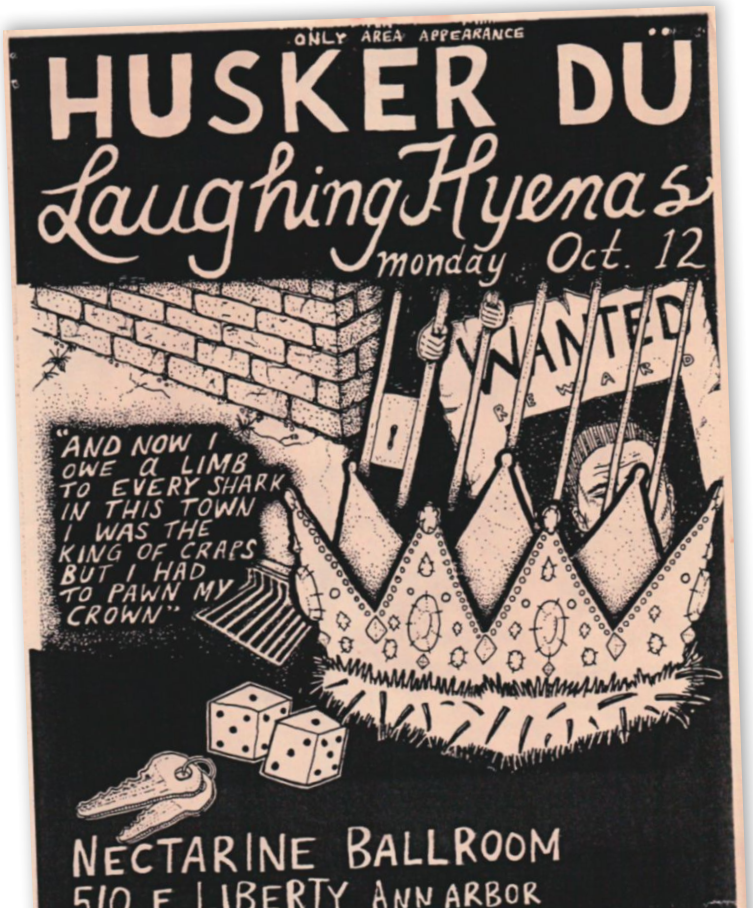
But what do they think is the most unique thing they offer?

Grant: "The outlook, I guess… We're creating music for human beings, not pop idols."

Bob: "I don't see many people trying to be as honest as we are… I think the lyrics are enlightening without being too philosophical… I don't think you associate a clothing style or a lifestyle with what we do… In that sense we're not exclusive to anyone, we don't exclude."

Do you agree that part of the appeal of being a band is the chance to prolong adolescence, to leave things open a little longer, to avoid the closures of adulthood?

Grant: "Well, there's growing up and there's growing boring, and the two are not necessarily inseparable. Generally, though, as a person gets established in their life, and the things that surround them are theirs rather than their parents', they start to settle down. I see friends that are worrying about their bank overdrafts – all the things I worry about too, but not to the exclusion of everything else. And the next



step is that you start playing the game, kissing up to the boss, all to ensure the security you're afraid to lose. But what you do lose is the ability to live for the moment, because life gets so bound up with planning and providence. People get conservative as they look to preserving their life investment."

One of the first things to go when this settling down sets in is music, or at least rock of the Hüsker Dü ilk. People cease to be able to take on such music. It's too demanding – literally, in terms of investment of energy and attention; but also in the sense that rock is like a reproach, can get to be an unwelcome nagging reminder of dreams that have been foregone. It becomes unbearable to listen to music, after a while.

Bob: "Well, almost everyone does give up music, sooner or later – it's a matter of when…"

Grant: "But there are those who give everything up all the time and right from the start. So even to hold out for a while is not so bad."

Who do they feel are their kindred spirits in rock?

Bob: "Who's at Number 186 in the *Billboard* Chart this week, ha ha ha ha! No, there are some like-minded groups about, groups that have abandoned the idea of pop stardom – we've even been accused of triggering that off… Bands like REM, Meat Puppets, Black Flag… Bands who can be widely successful in their own minds because of the psychic rewards of what they do. A band like REM that has a very internally run programme – they've got a manager that's been with them since day one, they're very homebase-oriented, having refused to move to New York or LA. Similarly, we decided to stay in Minneapolis right from the start. Now things are turned around so that a friend of a friend knows a musician who moved from Hollywood to Minneapolis, in order to be discovered!

"I like the fact that we're self-sufficient, that we look after our own finances, that we don't have a set regimen dictated by a corporation or anybody. One of the results of the life we lead is that we don't divide work and play. When I'm not working on music or doing specific administrative tasks, I'm writing or reading or drawing, but all these things have an input into the music."

How do you want people to be affected by the music?

Grant: "This may sound a little overwhelming, but I'd like them to come out a better person than when they came in, as a result of an effort by both audience and the performers. We're appreciated by a different enough range of people – rednecks, hippies, punks, 50-year-old jazz buffs – that I personally am really satisfied that there's so much love going down. I'm also proud of the pride we take in what we do… I wish they made drums like that!"

Is there a kind of politics in Hüsker Dü, in that you deal with the discrepancy between the promise of America and most people's lived reality of deadlock and impasse?

"There's politics in the sense of people trying to gain control of their own destiny. Life is too short to worry about who's on top at any given time – politics is like advertising, the basic products beneath the different wrappers are much the same – it's more important to avoid being stepped on, to find a life that doesn't involve a giant foot hovering over your head perpetually. The golden rule is: be neither a foot over someone's head, nor a head under someone's foot."

And are there "spiritual" concerns, too?

Bob: "I'm a questioning person. I'd like to find out why certain things are the way they are, and if that's spiritual, then I'm a spiritual person. Things like time interest me. I overheard a guy on the airplane saying that the Japanese are 25 years ahead of us. Now which 25 years did he mean – 1780 to 1805, or 1962 to 1987? How do you qualify time? Is time the same for a guy aged 25 who's never eaten meat and for a guy of the same age who's taken speed for the last 10 years…"

Grant: "In hamburgers!"

Bob: "A good question is so much better than a bad answer. If you had all the answers, why go on? There goes all your spirit, your reason for living."

*Simon Reynolds* •

# A benchmark for rock

**NME JAN 31 Turn on, tune in, bliss out. The band's magnificent double calls to mind the greats.**

**Hüsker Dü**
**Warehouse: Songs And Stories**
WARNER BROS

There are several reasons why I'd like to backtrack a decade to my teenage years, but right now I can think of none better than Hüsker Dü's *Warehouse: Songs And Stories*. Even now when my taste in rock inclines increasingly away from the mainstream towards the maverick and retro-rootsy margins, this intensely traditional rock records blows my mind. Ten years ago it would have changed my life.

Traditional rock? In what tradition is that? In a tradition of adolescent angst clenching to a tight knot, only to burst into an incandescent revelation of life's rich possibilities. It's the tension and release embodied in two 20-year-old chestnuts: "Love Or Confusion" by The Jimi Hendrix Experience and The Who's "I Can See For Miles". Nor does that map-reference reside solely in the sound, a pressurised melodrama of electric savagery and celestial harmony which for want of a better world I'll call zonk-rock. It also preoccupies the voice. Hüsker Dü sing of a breed of frustration so pent-up and refined that it achieves a strange nobility. You applaud a self-control so steeled and lofty that it can forge something positive, rhapsodic even, from white-hot anger.

Anger at what? What is the focus for so much rage? Hüsker Dü's is an unrequited world, a world without fulfilment; a world of problems but no solutions. The only way out of this headbanging claustrophobia is, as Hüsker Dü sing in their most beautifully uplifting number to date, "Up In The Air". Up, away, into the clear blue yonder of ineffably transcendent feeling. Turn on, tune in, bliss out.

ALBUMS REVIEW 1987

An old story, you might think: music for bedroom boys with steam to blow off. Yet there is a quality of honesty in Hüsker Dü that is heroically anti-heroic. Listen to their words: they have no answers, and they suspect no one else does either. Certainly, there's no messiah to follow, no perfect past to be retrieved, no Utopia to aim for. And agitating yourself over such things can only enchain you. Happiness and harmony come through a celebration of the freedom of disbelieving. This is, oddly enough, an upbeat album: peace through release.

But do the Hüskers, like Elvis Costello, appeal to a rarefied breed of rock intellectual because they share and so flatter our sense of pop literacy? Is it because I can cross-pollinate Hendrix and The Who – indeed The Byrds and The Yardbirds, Blue Öyster Cult and Buzzcocks – that I love them? Or because "Bed Of Nails" is Led Zeppelin's "Achilles' Last Stand" gone through hardcore's mincer? Or indeed because Hüsker Dü's "She's A Woman" bears absolutely no resemblance whatsoever to The Beatles' song of the same title?

But while golden threads may be traced in Hüsker Dü's fabric, so could you hear Tamla Motown, The Everley Brothers and Buddy Holly in The Beatles. Likewise, Hüsker Dü force you into their own way of listening: they command their own soundscape as authoritatively as did the pioneers who influenced them.

A consistently rich, varied and powerful 70-minutes' worth, *Warehouse* not only exceeds Hüsker Dü's previous zenith, *Flip Your Wig*, but it sets a new benchmark for rock in general. It is the most exciting zonk-rock (ahem) album since Hendrix's *Are You Experienced*, and that came out before some of us were even born. *Warehouse* is music of today, music which for once has nothing to fear from comparisons with the past. An absolute masterpiece. *Mat Snow*

# "We want to affect people"

**PRIMAL SCREAM are classicists and passionate rock enthusiasts – and certainly not part of the C86 scene. "We stood out from all those bands," explains Bobby Gillespie. "We were better songwriters, better dressed..."**

— NME JUNE 27 —

***"I'll tell you 'bout the magic that'll free your soul/But it's like trying to tell a stranger 'bout rock'n'roll/Do you believe in magic?..."*** *The Lovin' Spoonful*

A **YEAR AGO, THEY** stuck out from the effervescent hammer-it-down-and-turn-it-up of their C86 contemporaries by having the temerity to attempt something that was carefully constructed, lovingly polished. And now their insistence that whatever it is that turns Rock to Magic can be found in crafted quietness, in harmony and melody, puts them at odds with the Cult Missionaries On Acid Will Eat Themselves, and the designer dandruff brigade.

On stage, too, they're downright strange, the nervous static intensity of guitarists Jim Beattie and Robert Young, and singer Bobby Gillespie (his fringe a hiding place, his mic-stand a crutch) contrasting with the eyes-front arrogance of Martin St John, a tambourine-flaying skeleton in leather gloves. Primal Scream truly are the sore thumb of British pop.

And yet for those who, like me, still cling to the battered belief that guitars, bass and drums can free your soul, this uncomfortable, unpromising mixture has been the subject of a prolonged act of faith, of a blind investment of hope. Based on just two slivers of evidence (their "All Fall Down" debut and "Velocity Girl"), Primal Scream have been landed with the "Most Likely To" albatross. Mind you, there have been plenty of others who see »

DEREK RIDGERS

## MASTERS OF CEREMONY

**"Don't make our thighs look fat": Primal Scream at the Pergola on Hampstead Heath, North London, in 1987: (l–r) Bobby Gillespie, Jim Beattie, Martin St John (on balustrade) and Robert Young**

them as little more than a joke, an overdeveloped sense of pop's past grafted onto the body of a musical jellyfish.

This week sees the issue, on Warners' Elevation outcrop, of their third single, "Gentle Tuesday", which will be followed by another, "Imperial", and a late-summer, as yet unnamed, LP. For Primal Scream, the moment of truth is just "round the corner, the moment when we'll see whether the last laugh will rest with the believers or the belittlers".

Whether or not they can fulfil them remains to be seen, but if any band were ever equipped to understand the expectations of fans, then it is Primal Scream. They are pop fanatics. Their early interviews were characterised by a Stalinist credo that excluded all but a sainted few (The Beatles, a handful of American garage punks, Cope, you know the names). They've widened their net since then, but the passion remains. The band's key word is "master"…

"It's difficult to define," Bobby Gillespie's soft Glasgow tones maintain, "but for us it's all about having a certain spirit. All the best things I've seen this year had it. The Weather Prophets in Edinburgh… Neil Young the other night at Wembley. He was a total genius… and Chuck Brown on *The Tube* – what a man! Those snakeskin boots! It doesn't matter about age… you've either got it or you haven't…"

This stuff is no convenient, glamour-by-association exercise in name-drop; it runs deep. Primal Scream take their vision of rock/pop – a dodgy cocktail of myth, exaggeration, wishful thinking, more myth and isolated moments of incandescent music – and gleefully gulp it down.

"There's a fairly sane, self-depreciating vein in the group" agrees Bobby, "but we do love all those rock'n'roll outrage stories, y'know, about the Stones, or the one about Led Zeppelin whipping a groupie with a dead shark! That level of complete debauchery is really funny. And there was a story about Love taking some music journalist prisoner and keeping her as some sort of sex slave for a week…"

That level of complete debauchery isn't funny at all.

"Oh, don't get me wrong – I think she was quite willing. Myself, I'd love to have been fucked stupid by all the members of Love in the '60's! Even now! If I saw Bryan McLean in the street I'd tell him, 'Take me, Bryan, I'm yours…'"

This is hardly what we expect from the frontman (now collapsed in fits of helpless laughter) of a group constantly associated with all manner of sexless wimpery, but like I said, this stuff goes deep…

And it's their obsessive devotion to their icons – especially the '60s guitar giants – that's fuelled the disdain of Primal Scream's fiercest detractors. They focus on the band's line in relentlessly authentic beat hairdos, black clobber and pointy footwear and see a slavish following of fashion, a pathetic caricature of one of pop's classic shapes.

Confronted with this, Bobby Gillespie casts aside his customary calm and snarls defiance. "I don't wear Chelsea boots because Love wore them; that's shit. I wear them for the same reason that Love wore them… because they look cool…"

But the criticism isn't confined to the sartorial. It widens out to dismiss Primal Scream's music as being no more than a hollow echo of bygone glories, as being "retro" and "revivalist". Gillespie reacts with a combination of disgust, impatience and resignation born of familiarity.

"Answer me this…," he hisses, "every time you fuck, is that 'revivalist'? No! It's different each time, and the first time isn't the only one that is brilliant… Same with music.

"Anyway, we don't have to apologise for the way we sound and we won't. We don't want to sound like anybody except Primal Scream, and we don't. Forget all that 1967 stuff, we're living human beings, doing what we do now, 1987…"

But what of 1987 is discernible in your music?

"If you're looking for electronic drums or stuff like that, then nothing, but that's not how it works. If someone hears 'Gentle Tuesday' and loves it and finds it comes to mean something special to them, they won't look back in years to come and say, 'Oh yeah, that record reminds me of 1987.'"

Having shared their teenage years with the rise and fall of punk, Primal Scream aren't under any illusions about music changing the world. Indeed, as children of municipal Glasgow, they aren't prone to misty-eyed illusions about anything.

They choose their romantic vision of the rock'n'roll world and of their place in it; they choose to jettison the seen-it-all cynicism others use to justify ambitionless money-magnet pop; they choose to view their music – for which, don't forget, Gillespie gave up a secure and lucrative spot as the Mary Chain's drummer – as part of a crusade, and themselves as inheritors of a gift.

"We want to affect people wi' our music the same way that other people's has affected us…," begins Bobby, "…to sweep them away with it… And, sure, it would be good fun to be a pop star as well, but the important thing would be to be a good pop star. We wouldn't be like George Michael or Mel & Kim – that's tasteless, without class, faceless, emotionless, corporate pop. People deserve better than that.

"And you want your pop star to look good, don't you? Put it this way – if Johnny Rotten had looked like Rick Wakeman, it would never have happened, would it? But he looked like a total master God-star, and I think we look good enough to be on people's walls.

"That's part of the reason we stood out last year from all those bands. Not only were we good songwriters, we were also much more tasteful, better dressed, cooler. I know it's sheer narrow-minded arrogance, but it's true – we're just far superior to most groups around, probably a great group. And like other great groups, we give people – how can I put this? – we give people that glimpse, that glimpse of beauty. That, in 1987, is what makes us important…"

> "Like other great groups, we give people that glimpse of beauty"

If you need any further evidence of Primal Scream's perfectionism and "sheer narrow-minded arrogance" (or, if you prefer, of the spoiled brattishness that's indulged when your label boss just happens to be your singer's lifelong bosom buddy), look no further than the recording of their new material. The original sessions, at Dave Edmunds' Rockfield Studio in Wales, involved six weeks' hard labour, the loss of one drummer and a small matter of £40,000. Then they were unceremoniously scrapped, just like that, and their producer, highly rated Smiths engineer Stephen Street, elbowed to make way for Mayo Thompson. Some weeks afterwards, back with the relative sanity of The Smiths, Street was still shaking his head in amused disbelief.

"It was like nothing I've ever experienced before," he told me. "They're nice enough lads, but you can't work with them. It all came to a head when I found myself arguing with Bobby about a solitary cymbal crash in the rhythm track of one song, arguing fiercely for two solid hours…"

This is a man, don't forget, used to dealing with the far-from-understanding likes of Messrs Morrissey and Marr, and I swear that the memory of those weeks in Rockfield brought tears to his eyes.

Nine times out of 10, a band like Primal Scream would have me reaching for the triple-strength vitriol and my sneer-glands working overtime. The excesses, the unquestioned heroes and the attention to quite ridiculous detail (they refused to turn side-on for our photographer, in case their "thighs looked fat") are habitually the stuff of nightmares…

But nightmares are never host to the angelically spiralling guitar of "Velocity Girl". First time round, it gave me that hit – indefinable but unmistakable – of which only very few pieces of music are each year capable. It was proof that in all their care and craft and calculation, Primal Scream left room for that chemical thrill-rush sought, but seldom attained, in 30 years of pop. And since then I've nursed a hunch – somewhere between a wish and a hope, well short of a belief – that they will do it again.

To be honest, "Gentle Tuesday" failed, for me at least, to deliver, but an advance earful of an unfinished "Imperial" (resplendent with backwards guitars and lyrical hints of hatred) suggests that my wait will not be in vain…

Primal Scream – by refusing to accept the self-imposed limitations and all-bin-done defeatism – swim against the tide of 99 per cent of modern pop…

Primal Scream – as self-appointed carriers of a torch many think long extinguished – still believe in magic.

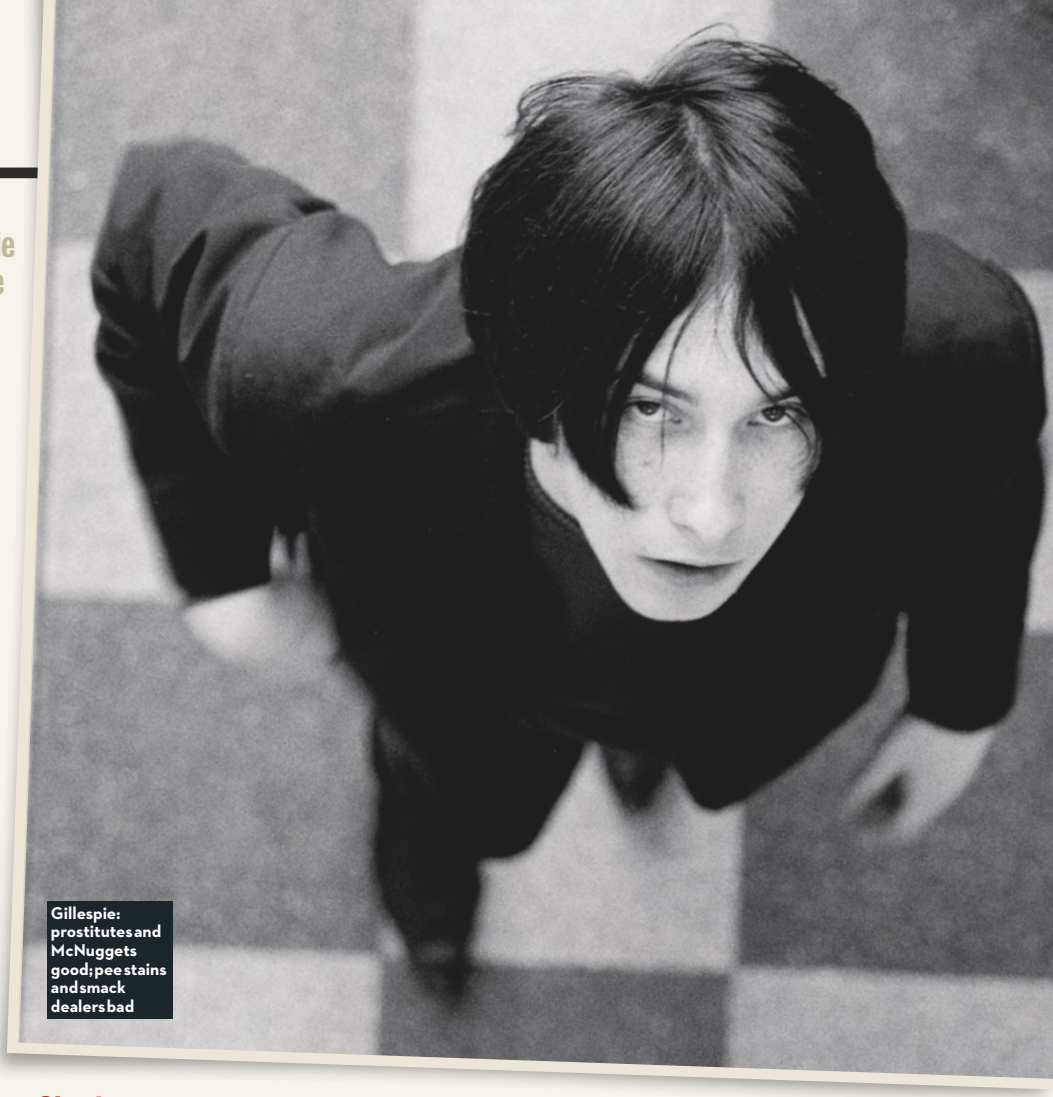
Primal Scream – until it's been proven impossible beyond doubt – are expecting to fly… *Danny Kelly* •

SHRINK RAP!

BOBBY GILLESPIE

**MM OCT 3**

Bobby Gillespie takes his place on the *Maker* analyst's couch.



Gillespie: prostitutes and McNuggets good; pee stains and smack dealers bad

## Wimpy vs McDonald's

I eat junk food because I can't be bothered to make anything else. I used to know how, I used to make cakes and things when I took cooking at school. But I've lost the art now, and I just get a frozen dinner from the supermarket and stick it in the oven. Or when I go out, I reckon McDonald's has the edge over Wimpy because they do Chicken Nuggets, and because Wimpy tastes like rotten cardboard. And Casey Jones is even worse.

## Baby Amphetamine

I never, ever liked that record, and I never thought the girls were good-looking, either. I never thought, "Oh, yeah, I'd like to fuck one of those girls." Just thought, "They look really ugly," and thought the music was ugly as well. It was a scam by McGee; he did it for a complete laugh, just to see how far it would go. A lot of people went for it, but when they heard the record and read the interviews with the girls, they realised they had no brains at all.

## Prostitutes

I think prostitutes are a good thing. I don't want to be patronising, but I think it's a shame that somebody's gotta lie down and be fucked by these horrible guys to make a living, but I suppose it's a sort of safety valve for men. It's better than having loads of people raped. I don't think being a prostitute is any worse than being the head of a record company or a journalist.

Patti Smith: life saved by Keith Richards

## Obesity

We were coming down on the train the other day, and there was a guy on the train – I don't know how he fitted into his seat. He had to turn sideways to get through the door. He had urine stains and white trousers on, and he was sweating. He was fucking gross. That was the biggest person I ever saw in my life.

## The suburbs

You can walk down the street wearing leather trousers – which, to me, is offensive – and people wanna beat fuck out of you. It happens a lot in the suburbs, but I was on a train the other day, wearing my leather trousers, and I walked by these guys who were obviously in the army, and they were blowing me kisses and saying, "Come here, darling." I felt like turning around and saying, "I can't wait till you get posted to Northern Ireland and the IRA blows your fucking head off", but if I said it they probably would have thrown me off the train.

## Hard drugs

Heroin is sort of legalised in places like Liverpool, where addicts can go to – I don't know what the group is, it's some council group – and they can get much better heroin and clean syringes, whereas if they get it off dealers in the street it's been stepped on so many times; it's got aspirin and glass in it, and it really fucks up their veins. If someone wants to take heroin, you can't stop them from doing it. It's just too bad addicts have to get it from some scummy guy in the street. I hate someone making a living from someone else's misery.

## Twenty years ago today

It must have been much more exciting to be alive then than it is now, because music is so dead now. Patti Smith once said that the only thing that kept her alive as a teenager was waiting for the next Stones album to come out, because she had a crush on Keith. I don't want to destroy anyone's dreams today, but who can 13-year-old girls look up to? There's nothing coming out today that makes me go, "Wow, I must have that record!"

## Girlfriends

I only have one girlfriend. I don't like talking about her.

## Accents

Sometimes I go into shops in London and ask for things in an American accent, just for a laugh. Like, "Excuse me, ma'am..." Do you know why Elvis used to call everybody "ma'am"? Because he couldn't remember anyone's name, apparently.

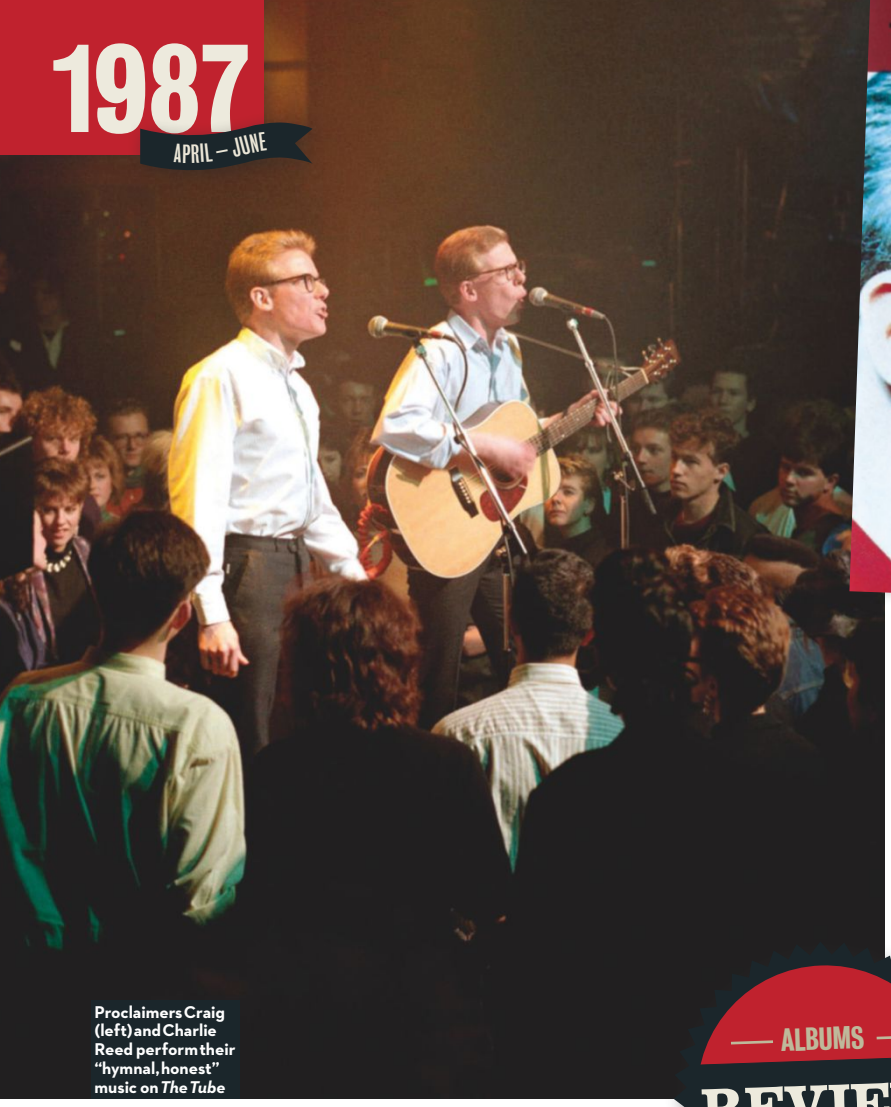
## Macho men

They have this thing about "Who's got the biggest cock?" We always get called wimps, and I don't know why. Ask my chick if I'm a wimp.

## The pop press

The way that writers bemoan the lack of good groups, I bemoan the lack of good writers.

STEPHEN PARKER / ALAMY; LEIF SKOOGFORS / GETTY



Proclaimers Craig (left) and Charlie Reed perform their "hymnal, honest" music on *The Tube*

ALBUMS REVIEW 1987

## ALBUMS

### The Proclaimers This Is The Story

CHRYSALIS

"*I'm not gonna talk about doubts and confusion/On a night when I can see with my eyes shut.*"

And I'm not gonna talk about the state of pop when The Proclaimers start a song like that. It's called "Kilmarnock Blues" and it makes me want to shout and throw stuff and do all those things I'd almost forgotten a record could make me want to do.

I have so many words to praise the beautifully stark simplicity of *This Is The Story* and each one flatters to deceive. Bloody cliches! In the face of such a fervently original achievement as this album, I'm ashamed of the critical language we've devalued through laziness and/or frustration. So, please believe me when I say *This Is The Story* supersedes style, cleanses me of such bigoted notions as folk or country & western or gospel or soul, and stands reborn in the basic, moving impact of words sung, hollered, whined and yodelled to the accompaniment of an acoustic guitar.

*This Is The Story* comes from within; you can feel it in the rakishly strained harmonies of brothers Craig and Charles Reid and you can keep all your U2s and their pompous open tuning, *this* is passionate music, living music, documentary, hymnal and, I believe, honest.

Sung, or rather *spat*, in a defiantly untutored Scots brogue (the single, "Throw The 'R' Away", makes light of unwanted advice to tone it down to make it), ballads such as "Beautiful Truth" and "Misty Blue" are hugely, aggressively sentimental, the kind of unashamedly masculine tear-in-the-eye homilies you often encounter (or indulge in) at closing time. "The First Attack" and "Kilmarnock Blues" are imbued with fighting, dignified religion and "It Broke My Heart" and "Letter From America" shake and rattle and roll with anger, shame and regret at families being split apart by unemployment.

"Letter..." especially, like Big Country's "Field Of Fire", is a joyous anthem, a true epic that mounts a bitter protest, manages to mourn "*Bathgate no more... Sutherland no more... Lewis no more... Skye no more*" and still sound defiant and celebratory and strong.

Not through fancy did The Bros Reid call themselves The Proclaimers – *This Is The Story* is a glorious record, recorded in a week and performed with a thuggish, sensitive, personal missionary zeal. It's a holy hootenanny. Get yourself saved. *Steve Sutherland, MM Apr 25*

### Happy Mondays Squirrel & G-Man Twenty Four Hour Party People Plastic Face Carnt Smile (White Out)

FACTORY

Blur. The boys from Happy Mondays skitter past us on the rob down the Arndale. Loose limbs and flares kick dust into everybody's eyes.

Friday night turned into Saturday morning in a rubber bubble near the Haçienda. Percussionist Bez bobbed a lot and hit things and hugged people while the rest of the boys hid behind the sofa slapping their thighs and giggling to each other. The soundtrack to Happy Mondays' raggedy existence is available for your pleasure on Factory Records, the most shambolically loveable record of the year and just about the only justification for independent music as the decade hobbles into insufferable politeness.

*Squirrel...* finds Happy Mondays taking the avowedly messy rock of their "Delightful" debut and the bastard funk of their "Freaky Dancin'" follow-up into 10 songs of discord and vitriol quite unlike anything else being currently hurled into the fray. The new single "Tart Tart" is as good a pointer as any, like The Four Tops and James dropping acid in a cupboard with words about blood tests and maggots that never quite say what you expect.

Through it all there's a surprising discipline where drunkards' logic splashes across the group and herds them into a rigorously executed tunefulness that separates them from the rest of the dirty dance pack. Sometimes there's five or six tunes going on at once, but somewhere inside it all there's a shared vision that sparkles without having to take too many clothes off.

The words remain a source of haphazardly magical beauty, mixing bluntness and oblique suggestion with a certain shuffled cliche. The opening "Kuff Dam", for example, swirls through a first verse all about cheese and fluff and total incomprehension before barking out, "*Jesus is a cunt and never helped you with things that you do.*" At times you feel like you're listening to someone's confession tangled up in psychopathic longing. It's not an easy record by any means.

"Desmond" takes the bare bones of "Ob-La-Di, Ob-La-Da" and clothes it with stories of dealing draw and the school sprinter who spends most of the time bombed out of his head back at the flat. At least it could be about that, or it could be about trying to get a cup of tea in Chorley after seven.

A dangerous, deeply disturbing record that John Cale, who produced, has thankfully resisted smartening up, the result being never less than captivating. If Mike Leigh had written all his plays on speed and set them to music, he might just have come close to Happy Mondays' brutal charm. Astounding. *Paul Mathur, MM April 18*

### Public Enemy Yo! Bum Rush The Show DEF JAM

Before the blast the last thing I remember was staring down the finely ground barrel of a Smith &

REX FEATURES

Wesson 38 and thinking about James Cagney and grapefruits. Then, of course, there was a deafening explosion – the booming of steel that brought me abruptly back to the 1980s. Public Enemy? Pah! Gangsters? Indeed! Street teamsters? Move over! The Lady In Red sold Dillinger to the G-Men and her soul to Chris De Burgh. They're all dead now, buried under dog-eared copies of the Volstead Act.

After the blast, I can see nothing but smoke and teargas. All I hear is the murderous syllabic machine-gun rap of latter-day Public Enemies and figure it's the afterlife – life after death. I mean, Public Enemy are just too *mean*, matching all the preconceptions of hard-core Black Panther verbiage while slicing apart most predictions of hip hop's grotesque decay. They amputate the old head and suture on a new set of limbs and trainers.

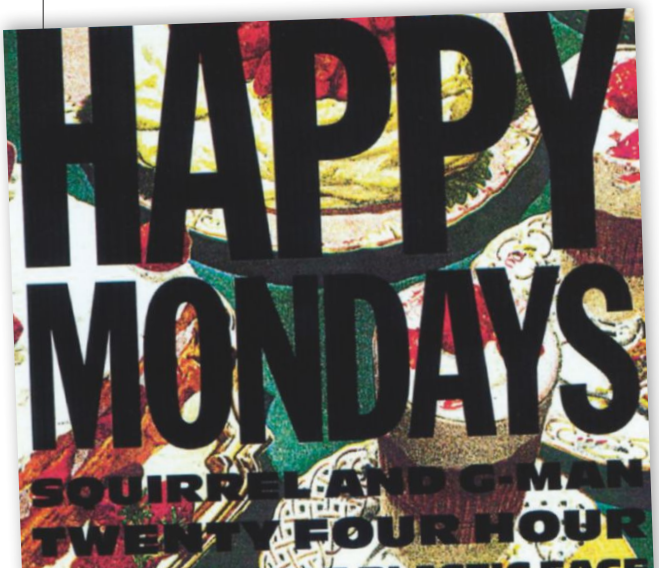
Sure, their ringleader Chuck D uses the hood of a car to mask his pulpit. Sure, he collects ghetto icons like '98 Oldsmobiles, street posses, crack dealers, cabbage, carnage, and any other skeletons that will rattle loud and fast. Sure, his venom can toast waffles, at 40 paces. But Chuck D's boasts aren't a hollow wishing-well echo. In fact, they're not boasts at all.

He's too smart and too committed to use rap as anything other than a means of black agitation, education and liberation. His words are ammunition in the propaganda battle for power and against street siren. Learning breeds knowledge, knowledge breeds power, and power breed reaction – hence the band's name. And hence the album's title. Chuck D won't sit on the fence when there's the chance to blow away the machinations of whitewash walls. The sheet-metal slam of "Raise The Roof" assassinates the neutered mannequins of anger forged by Kool Moe Dee, the Sly Stone funk soufflé of "Timebomb" collapses urban into urbane, leaving LL Cool J sobbing in the wings. Even the party scratch-and-sniff of "Rightstarter (Message To A Black Man)" is riddled with more invention than invective. Chuck doesn't just bite the bullet, he chews it up and spits out a hail of shrapnel that makes a sordid mess of clean white sheets.

"Miuzi Weighs A Ton" (already title of the year) arrives on the doorstep bound with hooks and red ribbons and armed with enough destructive power and diversity to steamroller Run-DMC, melt their mooring chains, and crack their pale shades.

As the smoke clears and the rubble of graffiti is lifted from my legs, the only item in the house still intact is a telegram message from Chuck and his friends. "*Yo! Stop. Mobilise, destabilise, mesmerise, and always aim between all three eyes.*"

*Ted Mico MM Apr 4*



May 14, 1987: The Replacements at First Avenue, Minneapolis

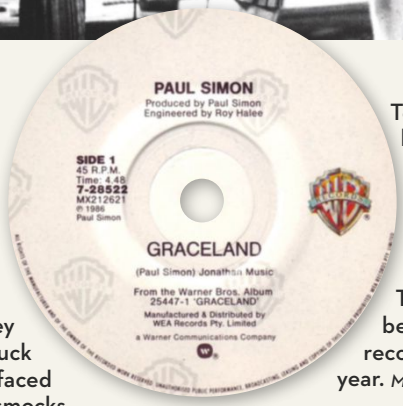
SINGLES REVIEW 1987

## SINGLES

### Paul Simon
**Graceland** WEA

'Cos if you don't rub 'em out, see, they get to be 50 years old. Then what they do is they go all funny and muck about with sweet-faced South Africans in smocks with triangles on. Also, they decide they're so dignified that they don't need to sing any more, just whisper. Hence: "Well, my name it is Paul... mutter mutter... and it was a strange kinda time of the year... mutter... and you know what I mean when I say one of my profound lines twice, don't you?... mutter... it means it's twice as profound as if I'd said it once... mutter... and so my name it is Paul..."

*MM Apr 25*




### Hüsker Dü
**Ice Cold Ice** WARNERS

A powerchord sequence as serious as your last breath, then a perfect surge to the horizon, harmonies in a zigzag smear across the sky, a hail of icebergs – Hüsker Dü make U2 look like weasels, sparrows! One of the three best moments off *Warehouse*, one of the 12 finest things they've ever done. Buy it, you sluggish people. *MM Jun 27*

### Ultra Magnetic MC's
**Travelling At The Speed Of Thought** CITYBEAT

Raved over on import, now available domestically, so splash out and make this a hit. This hip hop record – with its pirated "Honky Tonk Women" beat samples from "Louie Louie" and disembodied chant vaguely reminiscent of The Clash – is the best rock'n'roll record released this year. *MM Jun 27*

### The Replacements
**Alex Chilton** SIRE

All those stop-start rhythms and power-pop trousers, these guys are probably all Freddie Starr fans and eat Kentucky Fried Chicken – but The Replacements make Andes of The Knack! "Alex Chilton" is good old rock, all dirt and silver; a bassline scrambles up and down gravel vistas, a sudden acoustic interlude bursts up like a candelabra from the soil. "Nightclub Jitters" is steeped in the sort of woozy melancholy that even John Lurie would tear out his jaw for and everything else here slugs like a Jack Daniel's bottleneck jam. *MM Jun 13*

### Pop Will Eat Itself
**Love Missile F1–11** CHAPTER 22

Very much a whiff of Otway and Wild Willy about this bunch, I fear. Laugh long and loud at the joke of their covering this Sputnik spud, because that's all the entertainment you're going to get. Roadies on acid, PWEI are rock's spare tyre – a black, smelly, rubbery occupation of valuable space that you would only conceivably need to make use of in some kind of emergency. *MM May 16*

BRIAN PETERSON / GETTY

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# Readers' letters

**MM/NME JAN–JUN** Shoplifting, sociocultural criticism, "sea lion" Sam and more...

## Talent borrows, genius shoplifts

Why does Johnny Marr condemn The Housemartins for ripping off "I Want The One I Can't Have?" Whatever happened to "Shoplifters Of The World Unite?"

**PATTENDEN, Twickenham (*NME* Feb 28)**

"Shoplifters Of The World Unite":

Five Reasons why it doesn't mean anything:

Morrissey has never shoplifted.

Morrissey can afford not to steal things.

If Morrissey got caught shoplifting, he would benefit from the publicity.

What is "cultural shoplifting"?

What is "spiritual shoplifting"?

If we all stole a copy of the single each, do you think The Smiths would approve really?

**A BASTARD, A Bedroom, Manchester (*NME* Feb 28)**

## Barthes worse than his bite

I have a message for all of Simon Reynolds' critics: "Piss off!" I am sick of seeing the pages of Backlash wasted upon the monosyllabic criticisms of an ignorant and extremely bigoted minority of *MM* readers. It is quite plain to me and to several thousand other ex-*NME* readers that Simon and co have done more to lift music journalism out of the doldrums of ugly banality than the Sex Pistols did to the whole music business in 1976.

The music scene in 1987 is complicated and consequently calls for complex explanations and interpretations if its essence is to be captured. If Simon's critics would rather be patronised and talked down to, if they would rather read interviews packed full of questions about sock colours, sex lives and guitar strings, then I suggest they buy *Jackie* or *Smash Hits* for their pop news. Return to your intellectual fleapit, dullards, Reynolds rules, OK!

**THE ANGRY WOMAN OF WATFORD (*MM* Jan 31)**

Simon Reynolds review of U2's new album was the worst record review I've ever heard. 1) He only mentioned one song from the album; 2) The review was full of pretentious rubbish such as "…all the mystical outreaching impulses in their sound get condensed down into a humanist vision …"; 3) It doesn't really tell us anything about the album – surely the point of a review?

PS Read the *NME* review to see what I mean?

**ALAN HYDE, Raynes Park (*MM* Mar 28)**

## Wouldn't touch it

I write to you from America with a heavy heart and a saddened soul, for I have just heard Samantha Fox's "Touch Me" on the radio. I had been praying that our country could have been saved from her music, but it seems it is not to be. To put it bluntly, I think her record stinks and compare her singing to a sea lion choking on a piece of fish.

Please! Keep Mrs Fox and her records to yourself – we don't want 'em!

**EMILY BECKER, Virginia (*MM* Jan 17)**

## Mainly white reader writes

Another Cure feature! Why oh why do you give so much space to the fattest and ugliest group in pop? Also, why do you give so much space to black artists? All black music today is meaningless tosh. Most rappers, etc, show an alarming lack of talent, and their music (if you can call it that?) must seem irrelevant to your mainly white readership.

**STANLEY ACCRINGTON, Lancashire (*MM* Jun 13)**

## There but for the *Graceland*

Paul Simon came to South Africa and together with Azanian people created *Graceland*, which in turn put himself, and more importantly the Azanian people, on an international platform. These Azanian people, who have lived under appalling conditions for most of their lives, are now given a chance of a lifetime to tour the world, make themselves known, and possibly enjoy themselves for five minutes.

But what happens? These fat bastards from the UN want to deprive them of this pleasure. Just when these Azanians manage to stand up for the first time in their lives, these Botha-type clones kick their legs out from under them.

Simon, as far as I know, has never done anything in support of the Botha regime, and although *Graceland* is not directly political, he has opened up a new channel for Azanians (who have difficulty getting passports) to speak to the rest of the world. I have worked with black musicians in SA. I have seen a wealth of musicians who could set the world alight. I have black friends in Soweto, I visit their homes…

**GRAHAM CLIFFORD, Joburg (*MM* Mar 28)**

## Blue Mondays

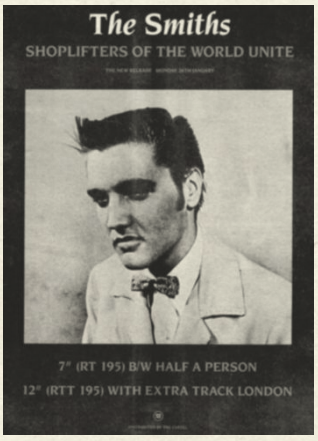
Recently the paper has started to fall into the "Who'll be hip this week?" mentality, and some of the better writers have become guilty of trying to make things more than they are. When people pick up the *MM* these days, they find frustrated youth-culture sociologists who think they're music journalists mouthing off myth-making rubbish.

Perhaps they should review artists on their vinyl output instead of pigeonholing them and arguing about street credibility. Take Paul Mathur's recent review of Happy Mondays' album – instead of a detailed and constructive analysis of the record, it was sociologist's *Jackanory* time. The fact that he offered a nod of approval was a surprise, as it would appear he'd previously written off the band as a pig-ignorant bunch of beer-swilling football hooligans.

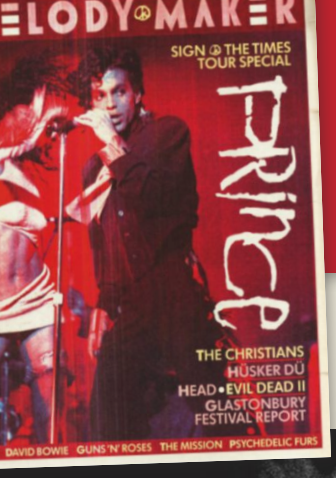
Such attitudes are typical. Happy Mondays, like a lot of northern bands, have never been given their fair share of coverage through the seeming indifference of those who are supposed to recognise excellence before anyone else.

The fact is that people up here have known for over two years that the Mondays are above and beyond the rest of the pretenders, no-hopers and copyists that pass for present-day indie pop. *MM* had better get its act together pretty quick, because it's fast becoming a garish downmarket comic for slow readers.

**PETER SIDDAL, Manchester (*MM* May 16)**



BOB RIHA JR / GETTY




# 1987

JULY – SEPTEMBER

THE SISTERS OF MERCY, TOM WAITS, JESUS AND MARY CHAIN AND MORE

LAWRENCE WATSON

# "We're very different people"

## NME AUG 1 What is the true reason for the demise of The Smiths?

**THE SMITHS LOOK** likely to call it a day after the release of their next album in September, and insiders are blaming a personality clash between Morrissey and Johnny Marr – the group's nucleus and songwriting partnership – for the split.

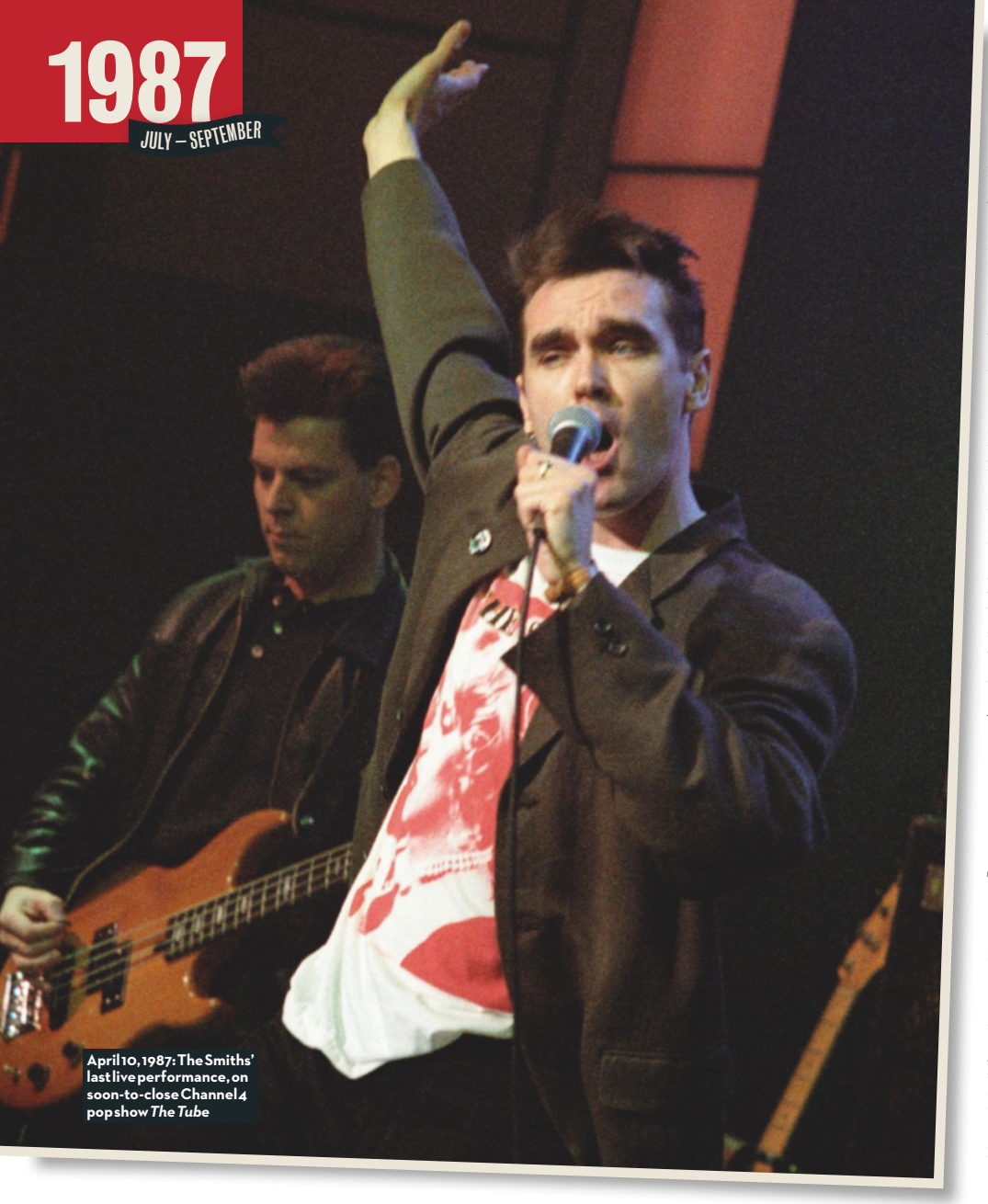
There's no official word from Rough Trade, apart from a rather flippant dismissal from Mozzer, but *NME* understands that relations between the two main men are so bad that they won't even enter the same studio together. Promoters have been instructed not to arrange any live shows, either in Europe or America, to promote the new material, it is believed.

Morrissey, when approached via his press office for a comment, said: "Whoever says The Smiths have split shall be severely spanked by me with a wet plimsoll." »

# SMITHS TO SPLIT

about the break-up of the band, she said,

The Smiths outside an evocatively named shop on Oldham Road in Manchester, February 1987, as tensions rise between the band's two songwriters



April 10, 1987: The Smiths' last live performance, on soon-to-close Channel 4 pop show *The Tube*

ITV / REX FEATURES

While *NME* newshounds await the arrival of young Steven armed with soggy footwear, sources in both London and Manchester continue to feed us with snippets which point towards the decline of the nation's top indie band.

Marr has reportedly told friends in Manchester that he and Morrissey are no longer pals, and that he is sick of the singer acting the self-centred star. He says the working relationship has also suffered considerably.

Morrissey is not pleased with the company Marr is keeping, acting the guitar hero and playing on albums by Keith Richards, Bobby Womack and Bryan Ferry.

The final straw was allegedly Marr interrupting Smiths recording sessions to fly to the States to record with Talking Heads, and using Rough Trade money to pay for the trip. Insiders say Morrissey blew his top and declared it was the end of The Smiths, and that he never wanted to work with Marr again.

**"There was no truth in the idea that Morrissey has any problem with the company I keep"**

In Manchester last weekend, a friend of Johnny Marr's told an *NME* mole: "I'm surprised that the press hadn't got hold of this earlier. It's been brewing for months – Marr and Morrissey haven't spoken to each other for three-and-a-half months. There's a situation where they now see it as backing down to do so."

Rough Trade have said next to nothing, and EMI (who are due to release Smiths material in 1988) are none the wiser. But what about the secondary characters in the band? In/out bass player Andy Rourke could not be contacted, but a series of calls to drummer Mike Joyce hinted that all was not well.

The phone was answered by a young woman who, discovering it was the *NME* on the line, said Joyce wasn't in and wouldn't be back for a few days. When told we wanted to ask Joyce about the break-up of the band, she said: "He doesn't want to comment on that. He has nothing to say." No surprised reaction, no flat denial.

Meanwhile, The Smiths' next single, "Girlfriend In A Coma", will be released by Rough Trade on August 10. The album, *Strangeways, Here We Come*, follows on September 28.

The single is backed with "Work Is A Four Letter Word", a cover of a Cilla Black song from the 1968 movie of the same name. The 12-inch features an extra Morrissey/Marr track, "I Keep Mine Hidden". Shelagh Delaney is the sleeve cover star.

*Strangeways, Here We Come* is The Smiths' last studio album for Rough Trade – and their last ever? – before the planned move to EMI. It was recorded in Bath, produced by Morrissey, Marr and Stephen Street, though not necessarily all at the same time. A *South Bank Show* on The Smiths, which could turn out to be their swansong, will be screened in the autumn.

## NME AUG 8 "Massively proud" Johnny Marr responds to the split

**THE SPLIT IN** the ranks of The Smiths – exclusively reported in last week's *NME* – has now been confirmed by the group's record company, Rough Trade.

A statement issued on behalf of the band (but written, it later transpired, without the knowledge of guitarist/composer Johnny Marr) ran: "The Smiths announce that Johnny Marr has left the group. However, they would like to confirm that other guitarists are being considered to replace him.

"It must be stressed that the concept of 'The Smiths' will remain the same and the group will continue to promote their forthcoming single and album releases and are eager to plan live dates once a new guitarist has been selected.

"The Smiths would like to state although Johnny's departure is sad they wish him every happiness and success with his future projects."

The obvious questions thrown up by this statement (What exactly constitutes "the concept" of The Smiths? Can that concept possibly survive the departure of half of the band's creative force? Who are those "other guitarists"?) remain unanswered. Some of the mysteries surrounding the break-up of Britain's biggest independent band were, however, cleared up when Marr himself rang *NME* to put his side of the case.

"First of all," he said, "it's very important to me to clear up some of the inaccuracies that were in your story last week. There is nothing even approaching 'acrimony' between myself and the other members of the band. I've known them all a long time and I love 'em.

"Nor was there any truth in the idea that Morrissey has any problem with the company I keep, personally or work-wise; we're very different people and lead different kinds of lives, but that stuff is just

SMITHS SPLIT – A SECOND EXCLUSIVE . . .

# MARR SPEAKS

patently untrue. And lastly, the stuff about me using record company funds to pay for a trip to America is totally wrong."

Why, then, the split?

"I'm not denying that there weren't certain problems involving the band, and it's also very true that a group like The Smiths can begin to take over your whole life and all your energy. That's certainly happened to me, but the major reason for me going was simply that there are things I want to do, musically, that there is just not scope for in The Smiths."

The infamous "musical differences"?

"I've got absolutely no problem with what The Smiths are doing. The stuff we've just done for the new album is great, the best we've ever done. I'm really proud of it. But there are things that I want to do that can only happen outside of The Smiths."

One potential source of acrimony yet to emerge from the split is the use of the name "The Smiths". Marr was genuinely surprised when informed that Morrissey intended to continue using it, but contented himself, when pressed for a response, with "I think that's probably tied up in a whole load of legal things…"

Although understandably uncertain about his immediate plans, Marr intends getting back into public view as soon as possible.

"I've already recorded some stuff and it's gone really well. There's every chance that I'll be forming a permanent group, though obviously it's a little early to be too certain about that. But I definitely want to have some live dates set up by the new year at the latest, regardless of the situation with other musicians.

"Part of the reason I've spent so much time in America recently is to get exposed to some different music. The stuff in this country at the moment has got me baffled; I can't find much in any of it. But it's a pleasure listening to new ideas and trying to use them. I've not been unhappy with the things I've done up to now – far from it – so don't expect me to explode off into some crazy new direction, but there will be some changes…"

**"The thing that used to make me happy was making me miserable, so I just had to get out"**

Any further thoughts on the parting of the ways?

"I don't want to get too overemotional about this, but I really am massively proud of all the things that The Smiths have done and achieved, and so from that point of view, of course, it's all really sad, especially for the group's fans, who've always been brilliant.

"But on the other hand, I'm looking forward to doing new things, and to hearing what Morrissey will come up with. I think the change will actually do him a lot of good. I certainly hope so. But, in the final analysis, the thing that used to make me happy was making me miserable, and so I just had to get out.

"But I never, ever wanted to turn The Smiths into the Rolling Stones. That was just more lazy journalistic bullshit."

So what becomes of the "million dollar" long-term deal The Smiths have with EMI? No doubt it will have to be renegotiated, as it is unlikely the label will want to commit themselves to a lengthy contract with what is, without Marr, an unknown commodity.

Nick Gatfield, head of A & R at EMI, couldn't shed much light on the situation: "It's all up in the air at the moment, we're not sure what's going to happen." But Gatfield did confirm that EMI have the rights to any recorded product from either Marr or Morrissey's revamped Smiths.

"Both artists have signed on the dotted line; every contract has a clause which gives the label the rights to any work they do whether the band splits up or not. Essentially we now have two acts for the price of one."

That may be so, but with The Smiths split right down the middle, who can guarantee there will be positive creative results from either camp? And what of the name?

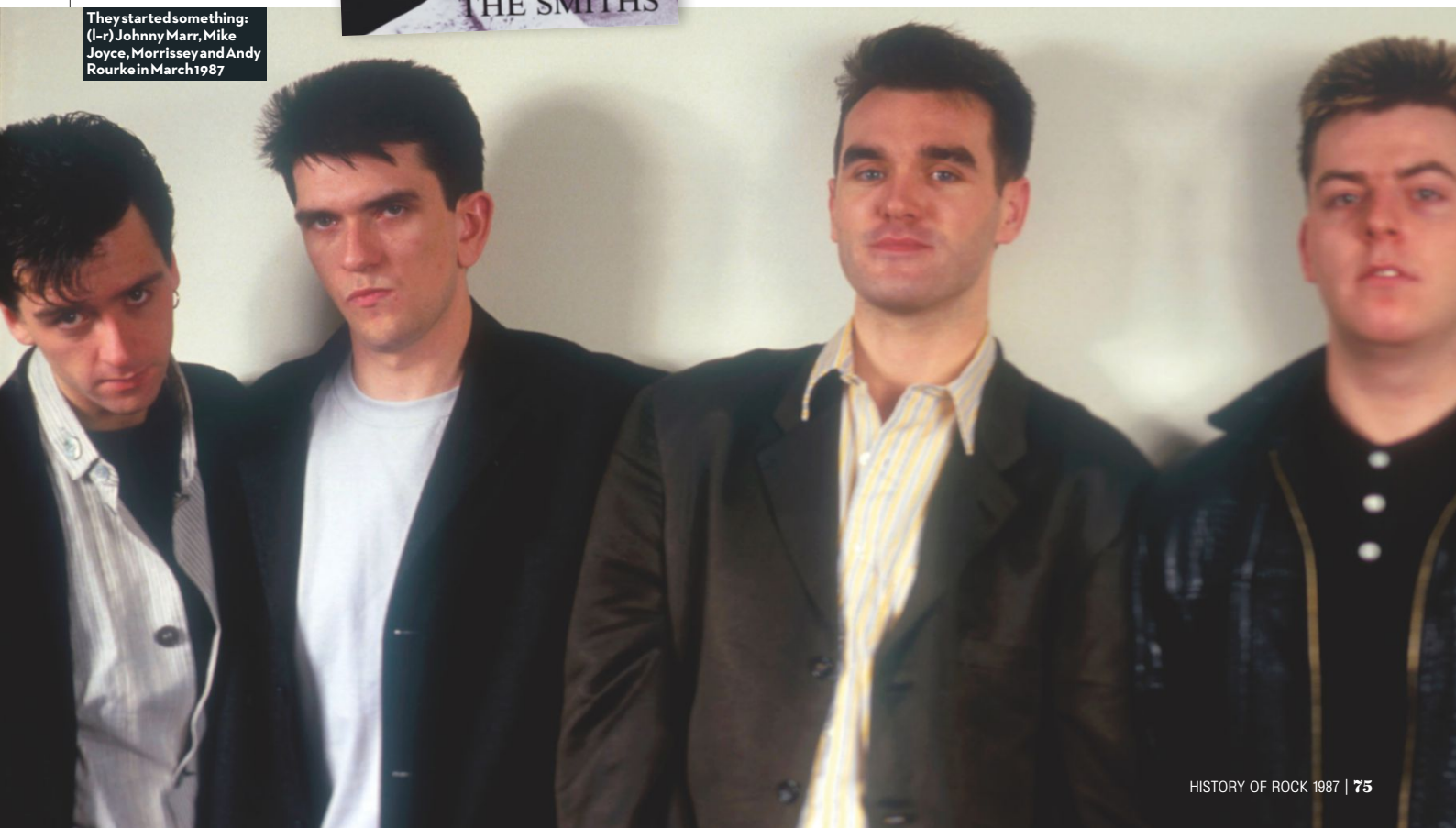
Morrissey intends to continue under the banner of "The Smiths", but he could face new legal obstacles along the way.

## NME AUG 15 Smiths about to reveal Marr's replacement?

**THE SMITHS LOOK** likely to announce the name of their new guitarist within the next couple of weeks. *NME* understands that Morrissey, Joyce and Rourke have been auditioning replacements for Johnny Marr for the last month, and have now whittled it down to a shortlist of two.

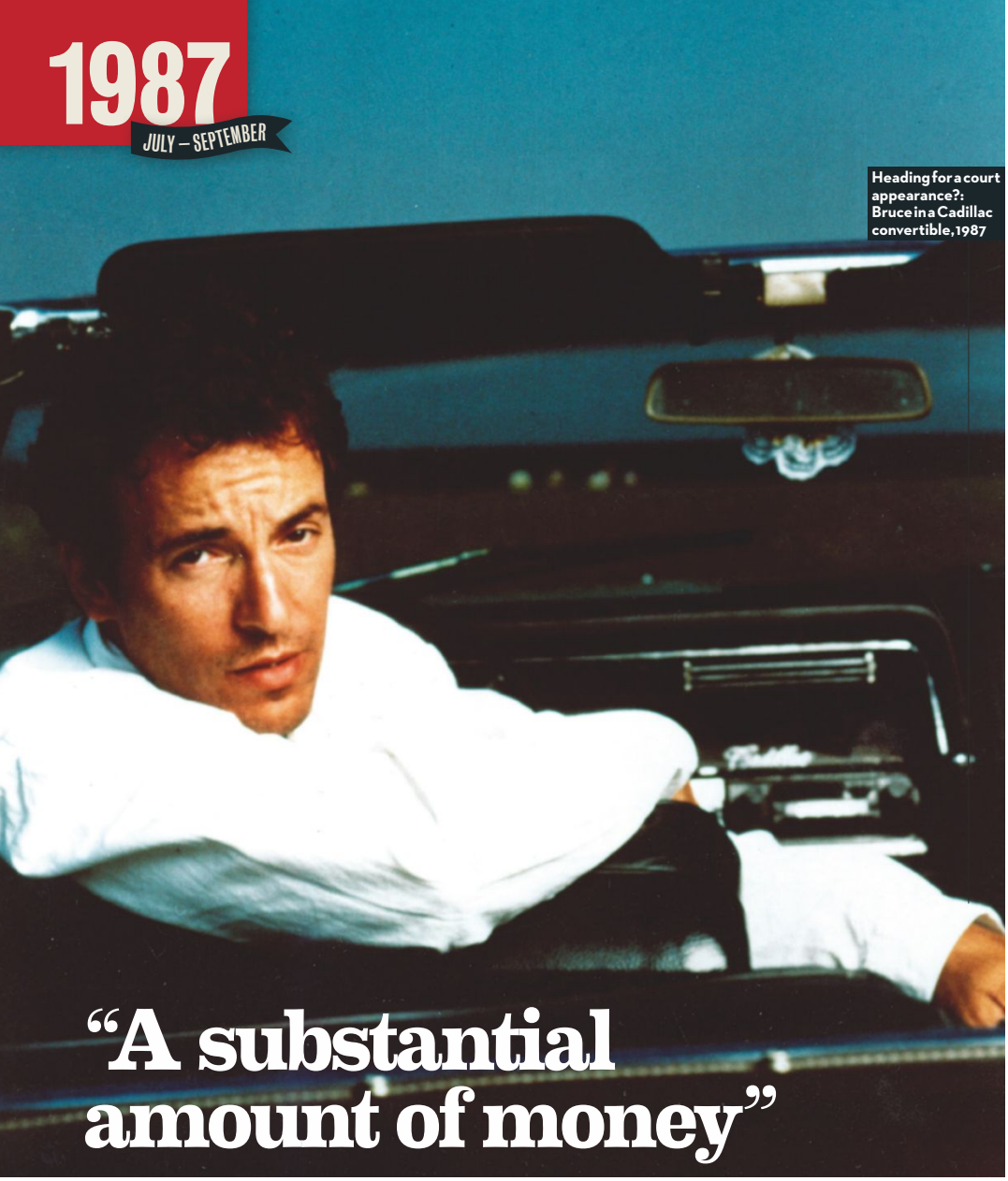
A spokesman for the group could not be more forthcoming, but hinted that both pretenders to the throne are people the record-buying public would be familiar with.

Meanwhile, another whisper making its way round Soho is that Johnny Marr will be unveiling his new band with a low-key show at the London Marquee. But don't form a queue yet, the prospective bash is not until December.



They started something: (l–r) Johnny Marr, Mike Joyce, Morrissey and Andy Rourke in March 1987

ANDRE CSILLAG / REX FEATURES



Heading for a court appearance?: Bruce in a Cadillac convertible, 1987

# "A substantial amount of money"

**NME AUG 29 Bruce Springsteen faces lawsuit from disgruntled former employees.**

THE ACRIMONIOUS DISPUTE between Bruce Springsteen and a number of his former associates is now accelerating down a path that my well result in The Boss having to account for himself from the witness box of a public court.

This scenario has emerged with the news that Mike Batlan and Doug Sutphin (Bruce's instrument-minders for 12 and 10 years respectively) have brought a six-count civil action against their former employer, his production company Thrill Hill Productions Inc, and his LA-based accountants Breslauer, Jacobson & Rutman. The action was lodged at the end of July with the Superior Court Of New Jersey, in Trenton, with Batlan and Sutphin requesting jury trial on all six counts. That, under New Jersey state law, means that if the parties involved fail to reach an out-of-court settlement, then Springsteen, among others, will be required to appear in person.

The details of the grounds on which the action is being pursued offer further glimpses behind the Springsteen image that's projected to the public. The first two counts revolve around the complex legal and financial arrangement made between the complainants and Springsteen when they parted company. In November 1985, Batlan and Sutphin were offered, and accepted, severance pay of $120,000 and $100,000 respectively ($10,000 for each year of service). In order to ensure the maximum tax benefits, these payments were to be made to two companies (Mike Batlan Technical Inc and Sutphin Sound Consultant Inc) set up for the purpose. Springsteen, it is alleged, personally guaranteed these arrangements, assuring his long-term employees that they had "nothing to worry about".

In February 1986, however, Batlan and Sutphin received cheques that not only showed large deductions but were also made out as though both men were still employed by Springsteen, thus negating the agreed tax benefits and costing the complainants what their lawyer describes as "tens of thousands of dollars".

The third, fourth and fifth counts of the civil action concern the fines that were assessed against the instrument technicians throughout their years with Springsteen; the third deals with them as a whole, claiming them to be "in violation of the applicable Wage And Hour laws"; the latter pair pertain to specific examples...

In the fourth, Batlan and Sutphin are seeking the return of $311.11 each (the now-infamous "canoe" levy, incurred when the pair lost Springsteen's prized canoe when he moved house. This they claim was "illegal and improper"), but it's the fifth complaint, involving, it is alleged, the forging of Mike Batlan's signature – that's most serious, and most revealing.

During the Born In The USA Tour, the complaint states, Batlan was fined for "an alleged infraction of unwritten laws made up by Bruce Springsteen". Said "infraction" involved the cold-air blowers that Springsteen, it seems, has set in the stage flooring to cool him off during marathon shows. Batlan – busy, he asserts, attending a more urgent guitar malfunction – missed his cue to activate certain of these machines.

For this transgression, he was informed by an unnamed minion, Bruce required that he forfeit a week's wages to a local charity. Batlan protested his innocence and offered to make a donation, but to no avail: that week's pay cheque did not materialise.

Unwilling to let the matter rest, Batlan's enquiries about his money eventually revealed, he alleges, that his pay cheque (for $698.81, drawn against the Chase Manhattan bank) had been sent to a local food bank with Batlan's signature forged on it by a person within the Springsteen organisation.

The state of New Jersey, unlike others, doesn't deal with claims for specific amounts of money. Instead, Batlan and Sutphin's action seeks "damages, treble damages, interest and legal costs", a formula that will – if the action (or a significant part of it) is successful – be translated into what their lawyer calls "a substantial amount of money".

**For Batlan's transgression, Bruce required that he forfeit a week's wages**

That, of course, is unlikely to worry an organisation as large as Springsteen's, though the possibility of an inconvenient, embarrassing and perhaps damaging courtroom drama must concern them. However, as *NME* goes to press, no response (required within 14 days of the action being brought) has been forthcoming from the Springsteen camp, perhaps indicating a readiness to do battle.

That response having failed to materialise, the wheels of American civil justice (infinitely slicker than our own) will whirr into action in the next couple of weeks and a hearing date will be set in the foreseeable future, perhaps even coinciding with the release of Springsteen's new *Tunnel Of Love* album.

GETTY

Peter Tosh (1944-1987) on stage in 1975

# Shot dead at home

**NME SEPT 9 RIP, founding Wailer Peter Tosh.**

**PETER TOSH, A founding member of The Wailers with Bob Marley, was shot dead in his home in Jamaica late last week. A second, unnamed person was also killed in the attack, and five others, including Tosh's wife Marlene, were also wounded.**

**Three armed men forced their way into the 42-year-old singer's Kingston home, demanding money. When Tosh and his guest resisted, the shots were fired.**

**Tosh has had a stuttering solo career since leaving The Wailers in 1973, reaching a commercial, if not critical, peak in the late '70s when he collaborated with Mick Jagger. Ironically, another Wailer, drummer Carlton Barrett, was shot dead in similar circumstances earlier this year.**

# Censorship bites

**MM SEPT 26 Big Black's album sparks controversy.**

**CENSORSHIP IS BEGINNING** to bite in the pop world with the news this week that the Big Black album *Songs About Fucking* is not being stocked by either HMV or Virgin.

HMV have objected to the title of the Blast First album, but Virgin have taken exception to the inner sleevenotes, in which singer and guitarist Steve Albini advocates the use of heroin. Blast First claim that Albini's comments are a "wind-up" not to be taken seriously, and that Virgin are overreacting.

A Manchester city-centre shop was raided last week and now faces prosecution under the Obscene Publications Act. Eastern Bloc Records had their entire stock of the reissued Flux Of Pink Indians album [*The Fucking Cunts Treat Us Like Pricks*] removed by police.

Panic in the streets of Nuremberg, West Germany, as well, where a record shop was raided and all copies of The Dead Kennedy's *Frankenchrist* album confiscated, complete with their "Penis Landscape" posters.

The *NME* news desk is also appealing to readers to offer any information regarding incidents of censorship in their local record stores.

SHRINK RAP! AXL ROSE

**MM JUL 18**
**Axl Rose from Guns N' Roses tells all to the *MM* analyst.**

Axl Rose: druggy fun plays on his conscience

## Aerosmith

They're a tradition I grew up with. They were the only band that the people who lived in my city in Indiana would accept wearing makeup and dressing cool. These people thought the Stones were fags, but everybody liked Aerosmith. We're coming to England with them this fall. It's something we always wanted. We are influenced by them, but it goes deeper than that – we're also influenced by, like, Muddy Waters, Howling Wolf, old blues things, various black artists. One of my band's favourite albums is the new Cameo record.

## Policemen

There's no such thing as a cool cop. The incident in Los Angeles just kinda happened real quickly. I got hit on the head by a cop and I guess I was just blacked out and was still raging and fighting. Two days later, I woke up in hospital tied to the bed with electrodes over me. I guess they had to give me electro-shock. I don't know a whole lot about what happened.

## Bad Reputation

At least we've got a reputation. It's better than being unknown. I've been really tame over here in England because I've been concerned with the shows and the interviews. Slash has been going out and getting thrown out of nightclubs and smashing windows. He hasn't had to concentrate as much as I have.

## Harley Davidsons

They're great. I don't own one at the moment, but as soon as I can afford one, I will. Any money we get goes into the band. We paid to play for three or four years.

## Drugs

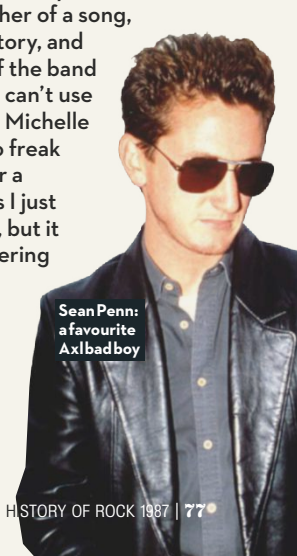
Drugs were a major part of the early thing. A lot of people just could not break their heroin habits, and a lot of them had to leave California altogether to break their drug habits. Sometimes if I do something bad and I look like I'm having fun, I then find it plays on my conscience for a long time.

## Sean Penn

He's great. *Bad Boys* is one of my favourite films of all time. I've got nothing against hitting a photographer if he's being an asshole.

## "My Michelle"

It's a true story. Slash went out with this girl when he was 13. I met her and I went out with her for a long time. Her name's Michelle, her mother OD'd on heroin and she runs around doing a lot of coke. I wrote this nice cosy little song about it not working out and I thought, "That's nice and cute, but that's not how it is." So, right off the top of my head, I wrote this cruncher of a song, the true story, and the rest of the band said, "You can't use that, man, Michelle is going to freak out." After a few weeks I just shelved it, but it kept bothering me. So I asked Michelle's opinion, she read it and she loved it.



Sean Penn: a favourite Axl bad boy

DAVID REDFERN / GETTY, PETER BROOKER / REX, REX

# "There's no manifesto"

**THE JUSTIFIED ANCIENTS OF MU MU are on a mission to bring about a revolution through sampling. But is it a suicide mission? "You're aware what you're doing is illegal," they confess. "But it's not the most criminal thing we've ever done."**

— MELODY MAKER JULY 4 —

**WE HAVE TO** have something, some devilish poke around the breach birth, death rattle or even growing pains of pop, and it could come a good deal less cheekily than The Justified Ancients Of Mu Mu. A crunchy cacophony of a single, "All You Need Is Love", and an equally noisy LP, *1987 What The F**k Is Going On*, have taken the genre's usual reticence and shaken it into some sort of rattly ecstasy. It sounds sort of, er…

"When you reviewed our album, it looked like you were just writing the first thing that came into your head without thinking about it."

Is that good or bad?

"That's good. It's exactly the way we work, so who are we to condemn it?"

King Boy D and Rockman Rock are the playful Zenarchists at the core of The JAMs' sneaky desire, wishing to remain anonymous despite the fact that most people on the face of the Earth know who they are by now. (Don't you *read* the music comics?) George and Andy, right? Morecambe and Wise? Flanagan and Allen with that old ¾ schizophrenia. No? Oh dear.

## Pick a card, any card

**"THE THING ABOUT** JAM that annoys a lot of journalists is that there's no theories, no manifesto. Manifestos are usually for people to hide behind when they don't know what to do. So many people come along to us and try to get us to be something that we're not."

So, what are you?

"We don't really know ourselves. Things just happen and we kind of watch it all."

The Justified Ancients Of Mu Mu were the result of two people having the same idea at the same time, an idea involving lots of all those brilliant bits from records and »

**Tricky situationists: King Boy D and Rockman Rock (aka managers/musicians Bill Drummond and Jimmy Cauty) drum up business for their new JAMs project**

haphazardly dull ones from others crammed into a big hip-hop apocalypse bin liner and emptied over people's laps. Incredibly, they were, if not the first to think of it, the first to take it towards an edge, to lead it away from the lumbering concept of what a rock-pop record ought to be.

King Boy D, who has spent quite a few years dallying with more conventional vistas of pop, is getting very excited.

"Out of all the things I've done before in my life, this has given me the biggest thrill. It's the first time I've made a record where I didn't have to think of it in terms of carefully planned consistency – it just came out over five days in the studio like one long, mad party and now it's a record. It's the first time I've ever worked that way, and I have to admit, it does get difficult to do things like what I'm doing at the moment [producing one of the King Grebos]. Fortunately he's a good bloke, so I can go back to that more conventional approach, but I certainly find it difficult to actually sit down and listen to records like I used to."

It is difficult. Once you've heard The JAMs, with their snatched noises from Sam Fox, MC5, Julie Andrews, Scott Walker, The Fall and about a million others, you'll either love them or hate them, but still never have the tolerance again to sit through four minutes of one polite idea. JAMs boys kick to kill. Does it get scary, this anarchistic means without an end, tearing down the statues and building them into ragged new shapes?

"It's not scary, but I know what you mean. We're doing all this and originally it was just going to be one single, then it turned into an album as well. Now there'll be another one. It's like when you have a crap and you squeeze it out and think, 'I'm never going to need another one.' Then half an hour later, you're thinking that maybe you will."

Does the criminality of it all appeal?

"There is that. While you're taking all these things and throwing them into the noise, you're aware that what you're doing is illegal, and that can be exciting. It's not the most criminal thing we've ever done, though."

What is?

King Boy D: "When I was young, they were building all these Barratt Homes near us and I managed to push a bulldozer into a house. The house just caved in and turned to a big pile of rubble. That was the proudest moment of my life until now. Then we've stolen a lot of cars as well. Doing what we're doing at the moment feels a bit like driving a stolen car when you don't know how to drive it, it hasn't got a mirror and all you know is where the accelerator is. You find yourself driving along some pretty strange roads, VERY fast."

> "This isn't one big wind-up. We're not doing it to take the piss"

As they thunder along, they're picking up attention not only from nervous lawyers waving writs and injunctions, but also from people taking exception to things like the name. The Justified Ancients Of Mu Mu populate Robert Anton Wilson's cult *Illuminatus! Trilogy*, a work from the pen of a man well versed in conspiracy theory, secret societies and all the other stuff that's bound to attract its fair share of loopy-loos.

Indeed, that very morning, The JAMs received a letter from an American urging them not to try and contact him, but to quit before they get into something well above their heads. "Watch out. You guys are in deep shit," he intoned like some sort of stentorial acid casualty.

"'Deep Shit'. That's brilliant. It's going to be the working title for our next album."

For once here's a group whose crazily impulsive promises you can actually believe. The JAMs' next album will almost certainly not be called *Born To Rock* or *Tougher Than Suede*. Despite claims of total randomness, though, there's more to *1987* than *Dice Man* double sixes. There's a fairly explicit political force behind a lot of the raps, bringing Aids, the police and Thatcherite ice into the proceedings, and not too many boasts about the size of their wedding tackle.

"We are keen to impress on people that we have got enormous dicks, though," they insist, "and there's also bits with the girl singers on the record where it's almost easy listening. I'm sure there's quite a considerable Radio 2 market for us as well."

In a world of prissy beauty, it is an admirable ugly record.

"Is it ugly? I suppose so, but there's a lot of other things there, like love, hate, desire, sex, pain. It's quite an outpouring of emotions."

Which is the dominant one?

"I'm a lover rather than a hater, so I suppose love wins through in the end. Then again, it might not. We've less idea than anyone about what we're doing."

What keeps it going?

"The excitement, the feeling of not knowing what's going to happen next. We're both addicts, basically, for just about anything. At one time, it was rock, all that feedback guitar and stuff, but that's not enough any more. We've made it impossible for us to ever listen again to things like that, and we might even do the same for other people. We're very wary about setting ourselves up as the start of something new, but you can't help asking yourself why other people aren't all making records this way."

Can it be done badly?

"Oh yes definitely. I mean, in the noise and everything there's still quite carefully worked out songs. We've probably got a few minor chords in there. The main problem comes from the practicality of making the records when you have people around you who desperately stick to the old way of doing things.

"I [King Boy D] haven't a clue about technology, but Rockman has, and between us we spend lots of time touching things and seeing if it hurts, whereas we have people like the engineer who got all stroppy about us putting a Phil Collins bass drum on the record, like it was sacred or something.

The JAMs: making records in a "totally different way"

# "A glitter-crusted charity Christmas card"

## NME JUN 20 Can The JAMs' first album live up to the sampletastic delights of its outrider single?

**The Justified Ancients Of Mu Mu**
**1987 What The F**k Is Going On?**
SOUNDS OF MU

SOME FACTS: Sampling is the new sorcery, the process that allows you to isolate any available sound and superimpose it on any other. Sampling is the electro-magic wand that zapped the tired old carcass of fag-end electro/scratch and unleashed hip hop. Sampling is the grim reaper for conventional songs, and the armoured liberator of the imagination.

SOME MORE FACTS: *1987...* is Britain's first stab at conspicuously sampled pop. *1987...* is primarily the work of one King Boy D, the enigma who as former hutch-keeper to the Bunnymen and acid-taster for Julian Cope, boasts some of Europe's most seriously widened braincells. *1987...* comes hot on the tail of (and centrally features) The JAMs' mighty "All You Need Is Love" single, recently legitimised after a hectic period as a desperado white label...

A QUESTION: And so, given all these verities, is *1987...* the runaway juggernaut hyperbrill monster crack that the outriding 45 threatened?

AN ANSWER: No.

AN EH?: Eh?

THE BITTER TRUTH: Sampling is going to render pop's smug face unrecognisable, but it cannot make you, me and next door's cat into instant musical behemoths. Just as the world's snazziest word processor won't turn your note to the milkman into a Shakespearean sonnet, so even the most ultra-mod sampling feat is only as creative as the carbon-based organism (you, me or next door's cat) sat behind it. Audacity, completely unfounded self-confidence, utter ruthlessness and a fast car will, of course, be useful attributes to the go-ahead noise-pirate of the '90s, but skill, feel, instinct, vision – y'know, boring old talent – will still be bottom-line compulsories.

**With the entire sonic universe to choose from, it manages to run short of ideas**

And it's in these latter commodities that The JAMs seem conpicuously undertooled. With the entire sonic universe to choose from, *1987...* actually manages, in places, to run short of ideas.

So, while "Rockman Rock" – Hamilton Bohannon worried hairless by CCS's toytown Zepplings – approaches the 21-gun-and-four-kitchen-sinks standard of "All You Need...", "Queen And I" dribbles off into what seems like seven consecutive editions of *Top Of The Pops*, and "Next" (despite a surreal joust between Julie Andrews and The Fall!) dies nailed to a saxophone of stupefying tediosity.

A (totally unfair) comparison between King Boy D's worthy but strained wrestling and the output of the current masters of sample-pop (Schoolly D's soundwiz DJ Code Money, for example, or LL Cool J's tape titan, Cut Creator) clinches the case. Theirs – all humour, vibrancy and colour – is an aerosoled version of *The Book Of Kells*; his is a glitter-crusted charity Christmas card.

AN END: *1987...* isn't a bad record, just disappointing, the sound of one good idea spread very thin, of novelty wearing off.

*Danny Kelly*

ALBUMS REVIEW 1987

I can't understand why people get so worried by samplers and what we do with them. They wouldn't have been invented if they weren't for doing that."

### Think of a number, now double it

**"PEOPLE HAVE GOT** to understand that this isn't all one big trivial wind-up. We're not doing it to take the piss, we're trying to suggest that records can quite easily be made in a totally different way. It's a question of throwing out all the preconceptions and opening yourself up to the kind of freedom and excitement you get from doing something like we're doing. We're not hoarding it for ourselves, we want to tell EVERYBODY about it."

It's easy to dismiss The JAMs' frolics as little more than a brightly coloured sideshow to the shabbiest circus in town, and their claims that "it's not a record, it's more of a happening" give the impression of the whole being a lot less affecting than it actually is. Don't give in to what your elders and dullers tell you, though. Believe me, it's far more than a gimmick. The Slinky and the deely-boppers have been well and truly trampled on by The JAMs' machete-wielding love stories.

The future is about as predictable as a trout with legs, and the only careering involved is when the stolen car crunches into the odd bus queue. I didn't want to ask, but I knew you readers would get uppity if I didn't, so... When are the live gigs, boys?

"We're going to have to play them, but the only problem is that as soon as we've finished doing something, we're itching to get onto something else, so by the time the people who buy the record have got into it, we've moved on. There's going to be a lot of people coming to see us with expectations that might prove totally wrong. Also, we've got to think of a way of playing without just slipping into doing what everyone else has done.

"We thought about starting off by playing Hammersmith Odeon but not telling anyone, so there'd be no one there but a few roadies and a pile of unsold T-shirts. We just want to see what it feels like."

Then there's the merchandising, which includes JAMs axes, skateboards, pneumatic drills, cars and rocket launchers (oh, and metal badges), and the prospective press conference from a helicopter in Seoul. Pointless, revolutionary or just plain fun, The Justified Ancients Of Mu Mu are tickling all the right places. Kick out The JAMs? Well, they're welcome round our house anytime. *Paul Mathur*

## — MELODY MAKER SEPTEMBER 12 —

**THE JUSTIFIED ANCIENTS** Of Mu Mu have run into serious trouble over their *1987* LP with 1970s pop giants Abba over the inclusion of "Dancing Queen" on the album.

The album, which features heavily sampled sections from '70s and '80s megahits, has until now escaped legal action. But the Mechanical Copyright Protection Society, following a complaint from Abba, has told the Justified Ancients to "cease all manufacture and distribution" of the LP and to "take all possible steps to recover copies of the album, which are to be delivered to the MCPS or destroyed under the supervision of the MCPS", and to "deliver up the master tape, mothers, stampers and any other parts commensurate with the manufacture of the record".

Bill Drummond, the Ancients' manager, has been told that he has infringed copyright laws. The MCPS says subsequent damages could be minimised by the band's "co-operation". But Drummond plans to ignore them and fly to Sweden to confront Abba directly. "I want to see the band personally." •

# "America in 1987 is Disneyworld"

**REM return with the political *Document*. Mike Mills loses his glasses, while Michael Stipe escapes the burden of profundity and gets it out of his system. "I just vomit, and if you're there you can catch the little chunks," he says.**

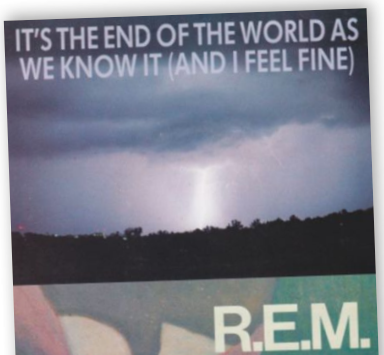
— MELODY MAKER SEPTEMBER 12 —

"**YOU CAN'T TELL** anyone you came here."

Michael Stipe mutters this as we pull up in the drive of his house, the humid night air alive with the chatter of crickets, brown recluse spiders and rattlesnakes. Stipe has learned the importance of protecting himself from the inquisitive glare of the unhappy, imbalanced and downright undesirables who turn up on his porch from nowhere, seeking words of wisdom or comfort from someone they see as the closest we've got to an '80s rock'n'roll guru.

For that reason the house is now strictly off limits, and if it's possible to hint fuck off, then a notice, pinned on the door, does so with characteristic Stipean charm. Once inside, it's easy to see why. Common courtesy and respect for his privacy forbids any description of the interior – suffice to say it's a magical place. An REM LP cover brought to life.

CHRIS CARROLL / GETTY




**THE LAST TRAIN** to Disneyworld left the station just as REM guitarist Peter Buck was waking that morning. Blinking his way across the bedroom, he switched on the TV and was, once again, confronted by the Reverend Ike, who, as usual, was frothing at the mouth.

"I want you to send me your money! And I don't mean that jingling kind, 'cos that only makes me nervous. I want the folding »

**REM: "We do things that are unpleasant to us, photo sessions and the like"**

cash! 'Cos I need a new Cadillac. God told me, I need a new Cadillac! I don't want my pie in the sky – I want my pie now!"

That was when Buck knew that REM had to make an album about America, 1987. America '87 and its surreal madness. Its attempts to revive the spirit of McCarthyism, its clandestine operations in Nicaragua and the blatant ones in the Gulf. The insatiable desire for money, murder and madness – everything that, to him, a young American, meant one thing – Disneyworld.

"It's a sideways look at the world and us. It has a kind of Orwellian wry humour. It's not that we're making light of America, it's just that I can't look at it the way Bruce Springsteen does. To me, America in 1987 is Disneyworld."

Buck pulls apart the slats on a Venetian blind and peers out into the Athens sun, which is nudging 100 degrees. He surveys the quiet streets around the REM office, a last bastion of sanity in a country gone bonkers.

The evening before we arrived in Athens, REM had played an unannounced gig at the neighbouring 40 Watt Club – rumours of which had shot round the close-knit community like a synapse, ensuring that the club was overflowing by the time they took the stage. According to eyewitnesses, they tore through a selection of new material and just one old song, "Begin The Begin" from *Lifes Rich Pageant*.

The experience had left them excited and obviously eager to talk. Even the infamously hard to pin down Stipe appeared relaxed, almost eager to please, if somewhat distracted by his friend's dog Joey, who he was looking after for the day.

REM's last studio LP, *Lifes Rich Pageant*, was characterised as much by the directness of the songs themselves as by Don Gehman's lushly textured production. The man behind John Cougar and The Blasters, Gehman grabbed REM's intangible, intransitory meanderings by where their balls should be, and sculpted them into something very nearly approaching pop. Surprising, then, that *Document*, the revised title for Disneyworld, should be an almost complete about-face, if anything, capturing the band in even heavier sepia tones than their pre-*Pageant* days. Was this desire to strip it all down and get back to basics a reaction against the highly polished sheen of *Pageant*, an unhappiness with a direction they'd not envisaged being pushed in, perhaps?

> "Every record is a process of reacting against the prior one"

"No, not at all," Buck explains, walking away from the window as the blinds snap shut. "Every record is a process of reacting against the prior one. I was really happy with *Pageant*, but none of us wanted to make that record again. I think we made the perfect record we could in that style, and the new songs, because of the way we wrote them, wouldn't have lent themselves to that big AOR thing.

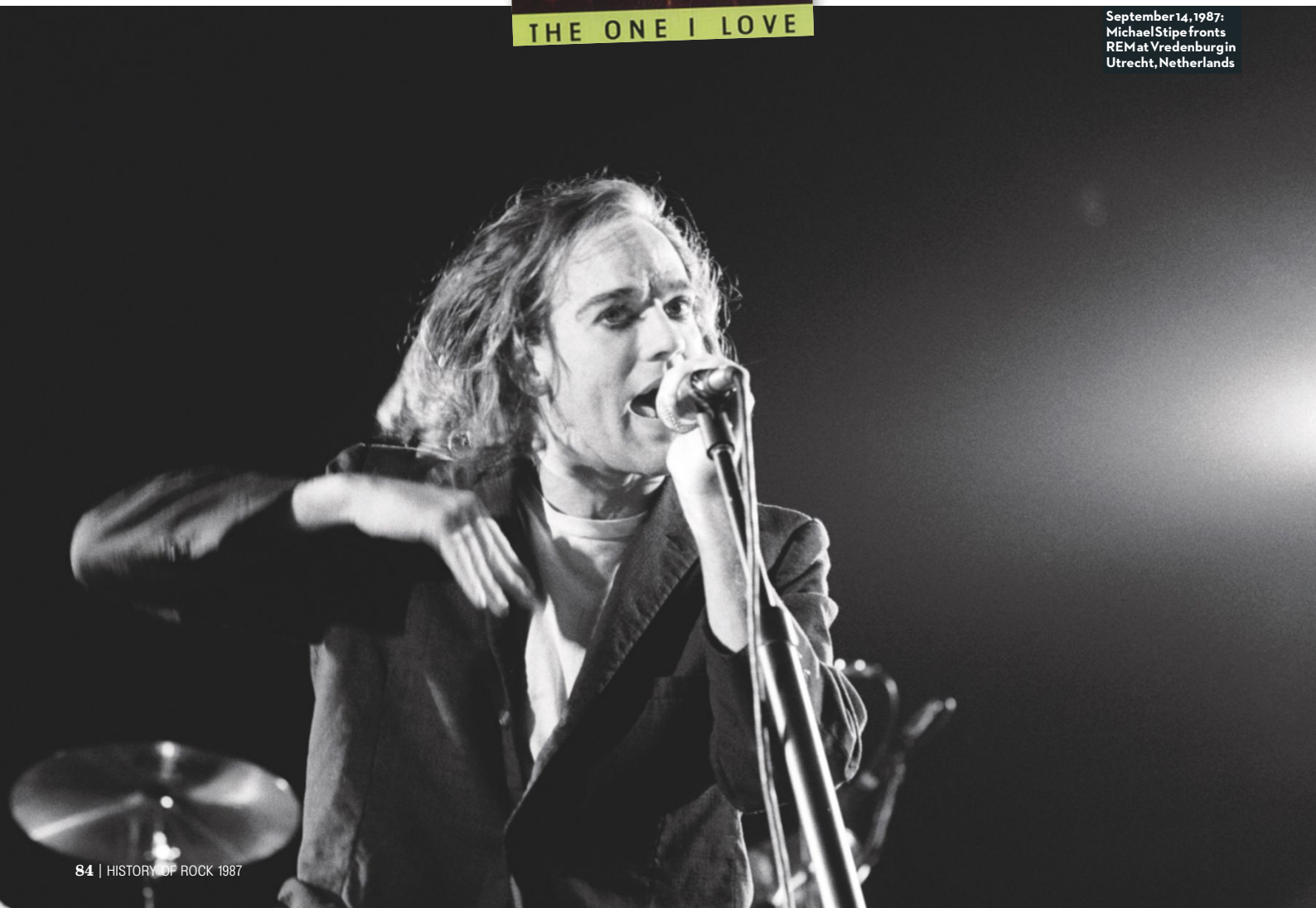
"We always go into the studio with a set idea, but it never comes out that way. It's hard to write to order. I think this time we wanted a really big sound with lots of chaotic stuff on top. Big in a way that a Peter Gabriel record would be, but not as clear – full of weirdness, backwards stuff and noise."

*Document* is, at times, both more violent and more whimsical than any other REM LP to date, yet is less exact in the way it executes its intentions, displaying an almost cavalier attitude to any notion of conventional songwriting or playing.

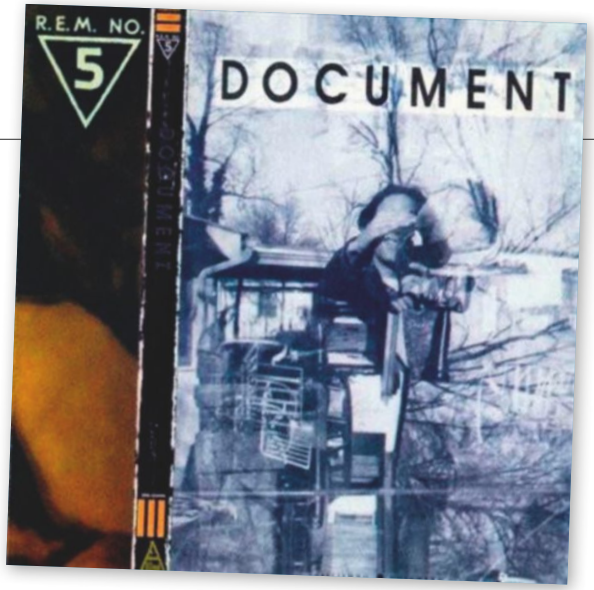
"Well, we've been trying to write songs lately that are a little less form-following," Mike Mills explains. "We're trying to write a little more musically nonsensical."

"Yeah," Buck interrupts, "I'm probably the worst for this, I'm the one who has to have a chorus in each song. But there are three or four songs on this LP

FRANS SCHELLEKENS / GETTY



September 14, 1987: Michael Stipe fronts REM at Vredenburg in Utrecht, Netherlands




which just don't have a chorus in the accepted sense, which is neat. Van Morrison has a lot of songs that don't have choruses, and it's hard to work that into a rock'n'roll perspective, but we wanted the songs to flow a little bit more and be divided less into anything like verse-bridge chorus. Where's the bridge? Well the bridge is where the verse and chorus aren't."

So there was absolutely no intention of making a commercial LP, then?

"I don't have a clue what commercial means," Michael Stipe deadpans as he's yanked into the room by Joey. "To me, commercial is 'Sledgehammer' or Gang Of Four."

Stipe's vocals are pared down almost to a shout on *Document*, while Buck's guitars screech and soar against them, defying the gravity of each particular song. In a way, Buck's guitar work plays much the same role on *Document* as Stipe's voice did on *Pageant*, and what few layers there are on the LP are stacked by him.

"It is our most male record," Stipe says, tongue-in-cheek as he disappears to fetch a bowl of water for his canine companion, never to be seen again that afternoon. Buck takes up the conversation.

"It seemed that on the last record, there was very little room for guitars because of all the keyboard parts. This time I got a bit greedy." He grins wickedly.

"It was a kind of release," Mike Mills continues. "We were coming out of the winter and we were itching to get it going, so we really attacked it."

***DOCUMENT* WAS RECORDED** in Nashville with Scott Litt, who Buck admired for his "Dare I admit it? Big modern drum sound." For all its music-biz connections, Buck claims that Nashville was essentially a quiet town which soon succumbed to the REM way of doing things. "Every night we'd finish at around one, go to a bar and meet the same five people."

The band describe the sessions as easygoing, a far cry from those for *Fables Of The Reconstruction* which, from a safe distance, they now admit came close to causing a split within the band as well as a personal crisis for Buck.

"I think we were all kind of miserable," the guitarist explains. "I hate to say it, but it was raining every day in England and we were all going through these weird pressures, and I think that every band goes through these times when you think, 'Do I want to be in a rock'n'roll band?' We were at the point where we could feel ourselves getting sucked into the business. I was pretty much a wreck for most of that time.

"I was just drunk all the time. It's not that I didn't care; I was just depressed a hell of a lot and it showed within the band. I think we were thinking, 'Why can't we just be hippies and say, 'Fuck the record. We don't want to do it – we're going home'? In the end, we worked through it.

"If we were to record those songs now, in a similar mental state to what we were in at the time, they would be very different. I do like that record. I'm not saying it was a failure. I mean, rock'n'roll isn't showbiz, we don't have to be happy. Fuck it. As weird as that album can get, that's how I felt every day. The thing that sums it up is that bit at the end of 'Feeling Gravity's Pull' where the strings come in and it goes down… 'Neargh!' I probably looked like that, too."

*Document* shares a similar intensity, but by and large, it's developed into an intrinsic theme rather than a state of mind. From the unstoppable droning folk of the LP's opening tour de force, "Finest Worksong", to the '30s WPA-style social-realist murals which adorn the cover, its central themes can scarcely be denied. Much later that same night, in his favourite pizza parlour, Stipe puts it all into perspective.

"In America, if you can't make money, they think it's because you're a failure. The work ethic is really intrinsic to American thought, and that has a lot to do with this LP. The idea that you can work and work and get what you want and then try for even more. It's the American dream, but it's a pipe dream that's been exploited for years. I could get by without money, I've done it before. You can get by in this town without money, it's not a necessity. But it's kinda gross what money does to you. Businessmen say 'hello' to me on the street now. They acknowledge me when I go into a nice restaurant. They let me put my bike in the kitchen at the best restaurant in town. I can wear a smelly T-shirt and they'll take me to the best table. It's really gross."

The likes of the Reverend Ike and his ilk, offering the promised land at a price, also meet with due disdain, this time from Buck.

"That whole faith thing is something that goes through American culture like a knife. It has done for years. At the turn of the century, I guess it was a big thing. Aimee McPherson and Father, er, what's that bastard's name? But he was a crook too. They all were. There's this American evangelical, hucksterism; America's full of religious nuts. They all come here for that reason. They got kicked out of their own countries. My family came over from Sweden because they were agnostics and atheists. They came here to get away from that.

"That's why, when you compare our songs to writers like Flannery O'Connor and Carson McCullers, I'm flattered but don't quite make the connection. Flannery's characters are all struggling to reconcile their faith to a modern world where faith doesn't play any apparent part. In our case I'd say none of us have got any faith anyway. I don't believe in God."

In the past, many of REM's finest songs have walked the fine line between patriotism and a gentle celebration of certain elements of American culture. Yet, over the last year, Buck claims to have derived most pleasure from the tainted visions held by Big Black and Sonic Youth. Was theirs a view he'd been tempted to share?

"I dunno. I'm certainly not an apologist for America, though it would be a nice piece of land if you could wipe out most of the people. I think Sonic Youth's vision is very tongue-in-cheek. I don't think you can take all this America 1969 blood and Manson stuff at all seriously. I mean, they haven't killed anyone yet. It's real Alice Cooperish. They're probably just a lot more comfortable with that imagery than I would be. I'm not a blood-and-guts type guy. All the clothes that I like have skulls on them, but if I wore them I'd look a dork. I just look at it all differently to them."

Nevertheless, the songs on *Document* are more overtly political and damning than anything they've put their name to before. "Welcome To The Occupation", "Exhuming McCarthy" and "It's The End Of The World As We Know It" all rage with a seemingly uncontrollable anger. It's almost as if the passion and poignancy so prevalent on *Fables*, stirred by the spread of inhumanity and decay, had festered and boiled over into blind hatred.

> "Michael is really worried about this conservative trend going on"

"Well, generally, Michael is really worried about this conservative trend that's going on and the way that people in power seem to look at things," Buck ventures. "Right now, Russia has the most sensible leader they've ever had and Reagan is just keeping the door open for more war. Reagan is a moron and that's all there is to it. I get upset when I think about him."

"End Of The World" and "Strange", a cover of the old Wire classic, are also among the most powerful and strange vocal performances Stipe has ever laid down. Both are delivered in a speed-crazy rush of emotion.

"I wrote the words to 'End Of The World' as I sung it. When they showed me that song in the studio I just said, '*It's the end of the world as we know it and I feel fine.*' I wanted it to be the most bombastic vocal that I could possibly muster. Something that would completely overwhelm you and drip off your shoulders and stick in your hair like bubblegum.

"'Strange' was a scratch vocal. I went in and sang it twice and said, 'That's it.' I didn't listen to it after that. They took it away and mixed it up and put some reverb on it. I just couldn't be bothered with it. I put a whole load of energy into the other songs and that one was just, 'Ugh!' It's like spitting – you don't want to get it over your shirt, but you wanna get it out and keep walking." »

"WE'VE NEVER PLAYED before. It's gonna be awful – I can't wait!"

Michael Stipe is musing on the evening's entertainment. Athens' two rock clubs, The 40 Watt and The Uptown Lounge, offer the kind of nightly entertainment and guest appearances that, two or three years ago, would have had the average Brit rock critic salivating for more. Tonight, Stipe and a couple of friends are opening for his sister's band, Cowface. Unfortunately they *are* awful. Stipe whacking out a guitar drone while two beefcakes bash sheet metal with 10lb hammers – a more testing Test Department.

A tortuous 30 minutes after it begins, an end is abruptly called and Athens' youth drifts back to the bar, unsure whether to laugh or mourn the loss of their eardrums.

In the early hours of the morning, in a parking lot adjacent to The 40 Watt, Stipe unveils his reasons for all the recent extracurricular activities. This last year has seen him extending his work with The Golden Palominos as well as producing an LP by Hugo Largo, the bassist he met when interviewed by him in New York.

"As a band, what REM are capable of is still pretty limited when it comes down to it. There's a very set position where I exist. I could never get a sledgehammer on stage and hit metal with REM. I've done it in the early days when we used to play biker bars. I'd wear this globe as a hat and I'd take it off and pound it on stage. The bikers thought I was insane, so they left me alone. I think they kinda admired me 'cos I was this real skinny kid with funny hair.

"It's not really a frustration with REM. If anything, it's been opened up so wide to us that it's actually dangerous. But we're able to keep things intact and stay on top of each other. REM now is kinda like the statues that look out on Easter Island." His voice trails away, a trifle embarrassed at the veracity of the comment.

"I don't know why that came to me," he says. "It just did. I can't explain that one. I was trying to make some connection and it didn't happen."

Do you feel there's a responsibility as Michael Stipe to always try and be profound?

"Not really, no. I think my most artesian profundity comes when I have no idea and I'm just rambling. The best time to catch me is when I've had seven cups of coffee and I haven't slept in three days. I just vomit, and if you're there you can catch the little chunks.

"I've read some interviews with myself and it's like I could not believe that I had said these things, they are so amazing. It's like Kafka or Jung. It sounds so incredible and underneath it says 'claims Stipe'. And I just go, 'Wow! Something's there after all.'"

The previous evening at a Mexican restaurant, the waitress had voiced much the same opinion and had stared in disbelief when we told her we'd spent 10 hours on a plane just to talk to REM.

"We see them in here all the time," she'd said. "Last week, Mike Mills left his glasses in here and all the other waitresses were trying them on. It was real funny. Maybe we should have auctioned them."

Athens hardly trades on the reputation of its most famous sons. A T-shirt here or a poster there modestly proclaiming "Infamous Athenians!". A far cry from the intensity with which Distipels, as they're called in Athens, study the band's output and lyrics, often coming up with the most amazing translations and interpretations.

"I guess I wouldn't have it any other way," says Stipe, slurping at an iced espresso. "If I had a band, I would want people to either love them or despise them. I'd hate for them to just go, 'Oh yeah.' In a lot of ways, I think people come to the band because they think that I have some kind of answer. I am kind of questioning things in a different way, but I'm just as lost as everyone else. So when I'm expected to answer these questions and spout forth with humorous and philosophical anecdotes, sometimes it's difficult."

Stipe's reluctance to talk has led to Peter Buck and Mike Mills tackling most of the interview chores, which they do with the geniality of old pros. I wondered whether it was the insanity or the intensity of the earlier interviews that Stipe found so repellent.

"Well, I don't dislike doing them. It's just actually what comes out of them which is not to my liking. I enjoy talking to people, except that it's always me, me, me, which is kinda gross. A lot of times in interviews I come across as very sensitive or very dour, because when I talk about myself it's like, 'Ugh!' I get too intense. I'm real reluctant to open up."

Does it hurt when people insist on calling you weird?

"No, I don't care. I've dealt with that all my life. I don't think anybody can hurt me really. I think they're disappointed when they find out how normal I really am. 'Cos I'm not weird."

> "The thing that always worries me is that we'll dry up"

The memory of a cold night in Glasgow two years ago flashed into my head. An everlasting vision of Stipe careering frantically across the Apollo stage, wearing watches all over his body and with the word "DOG" written in felt-tip across his forehead. This is normal behaviour?

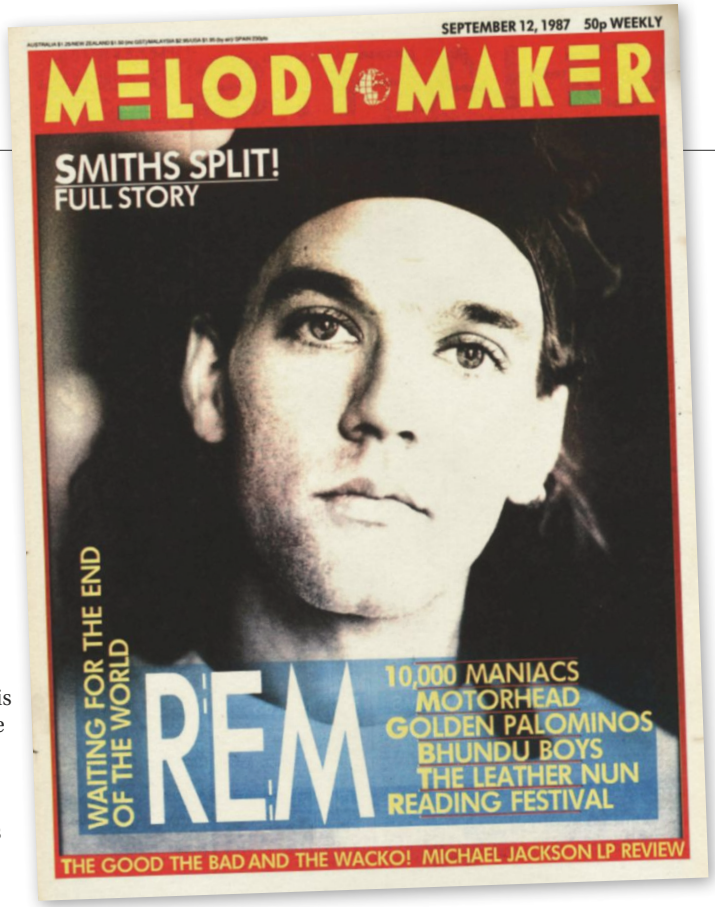
"Oh, I was so sick that night," he protests. "I couldn't stand up. I hadn't eaten anything but potatoes for a whole week 'cos the food is so bad in England. All I could eat was a sprig of parsley before I went on stage and I was vomiting and shitting. It was just awful. I felt like a dog, so I took a felt-tip and wrote it on my face. But I started sweating if off while I was on stage, which looked weird."

There are other rumours, though, sightings of him reading books upside down for one. Could he remember the first time that someone remarked that what he was doing was strange or odd?

"You know, my earliest memory as a child was when I was two years old and I had scarlet fever. I was hallucinating and I was having my picture taken. I had a sweater on and I was really miserable and there was this guy zooming in and out. To me that was weird, but I can't remember people remarking that I was weird. I don't know… I think you block those things out."

REM: (l–r) Michael Stipe, Bill Berry, Peter Buck and Mike Mills

CHRIS CARROLL / GETTY




**THE FOLLOWING MORNING** he's up bright and early and already sitting by the phone in the REM office when we call. A pair of plastic sunglasses sit awkwardly on his head, held together with a wad of Sellotape over the bridge of the nose. Along the sides he's glued strips of cardboard, giving him the appearance of an Athens Terminator. In a truck parked in the street two storeys below, 18 globes of the world are stacked neatly, ready to be burned and bent out of shape in the video for "Finest Worksong" that Stipe is shooting this afternoon.

While he's not nearly as sensitive as he's constantly portrayed, Stipe is an incredibly serious and obsessive artist who never stops work, drawing inspiration from every waking moment and, often as not, every sleeping one. Indeed, he cites his dreams as an often frightening subconscious release.

"I was shot in one dream by this assassin who was sent to kill me. But I didn't die. I was shot point blank, but he didn't kill me. In the dream, he was hired to kill me, but he couldn't do so until I looked him in the eyes. He tracked me for a long time and I finally got tired of it, so I looked him in the eyes and he shot me. But I didn't die. So then I was wounded and went on for a while, got tired, I looked him in the eye and he took an ice pick and stuck it in my temple and killed me."

Despite the unguarded descriptions of dreams, Stipe has learnt to hold his tongue on the more mystical side of his nature. He refuses to be drawn into discussing the transgression therapy he is about to undergo, whereby he will be hypnotised and taken back to a past life.

"Well, you know it's really outside the band and I think it would infuriate them if I talked about it. We get enough shit about being hippies already, especially now my hair's long again."

That said, REM don't really care two hoots or too much about how they're perceived by others. Like every good band, they understand what it is they do that is so unique and are now sitting in a position where they can afford to indulge what their conscience tells them is right.

"Every decision we've made that has seemed to fly in the face of common sense has worked for us," Mike had said the previous afternoon. Peter Buck had agreed. "You know, people say that we don't play the game, but I don't know. To a certain degree, we do things that are unpleasant to us, photo sessions and the like. It's just that we won't do things that we feel are deplorable or are against our ideals. They'd like us to have a glitzy video where we all sing and look sincere and where there's a pretty girl, and we have to say, 'Wait a minute. If we did that we'd look such pricks.' If you've got something people want, you don't have to follow the game plan.

"Prince doesn't. Prince has weird covers and weird records. The new one sounds like a demo to me – which is partly good and partly bad. But at least he had the balls to do it."

Likewise, REM have turned down a prospective Radio 1 session scheduled for when they hit the UK this week.

"It's not like we won't do it," Buck explains, "it's just that we've got better things to do. If things hadn't have been so rushed, maybe we would have found time."

Further example of their single-mindedness is the compilation LP *Dead Letter Office*. From a marketing point of view, released dangerously close to *Document*, the LP works so well because it includes all the embarrassing bits other bands leave out. It makes you feel like you're listening to something you shouldn't be – which, as everyone knows, was one of the earliest appeals of rock'n'roll.

"Yeah well, we didn't have too many illusions that it would sell two million," Buck laughs. "It's a summertime album. Plus, if we put it out now we can have control over what's on it as well as the packaging. If we were to change record companies, we wouldn't have that control. I was gonna leave out some of the ones that were more embarrassing, but ah, fuck it!"

What didn't make it on to the LP?

"I really shudder to think!"

Dreams for the future include a reunion with Don Dixon and Mitch Easter, probably after the next LP, an attempt to buy the rights for the soundtrack of a cinematic version of Iain Banks' *The Wasp Factory*, and more production work for each band member.

"Basically, we're trying to learn how to produce," Mike says. "Also it's good to do other stuff besides performing. We can have a secondary career, so if the band should break up, we can always do that."

Horror of horrors. You're not seriously contemplating…?

"Well," Buck sighs, "I've always thought that a band should put out 10 LPs before they split. But the thing that always worries me is that we'll dry up. Every time we finish an LP, that's what we think. And it's like, 'God, this is it, guys, it's finishing, enjoy it while you can.' There again, I suppose we could always play Las Vegas. Nostalgia for the early '80s! Now that I could look forward to!"

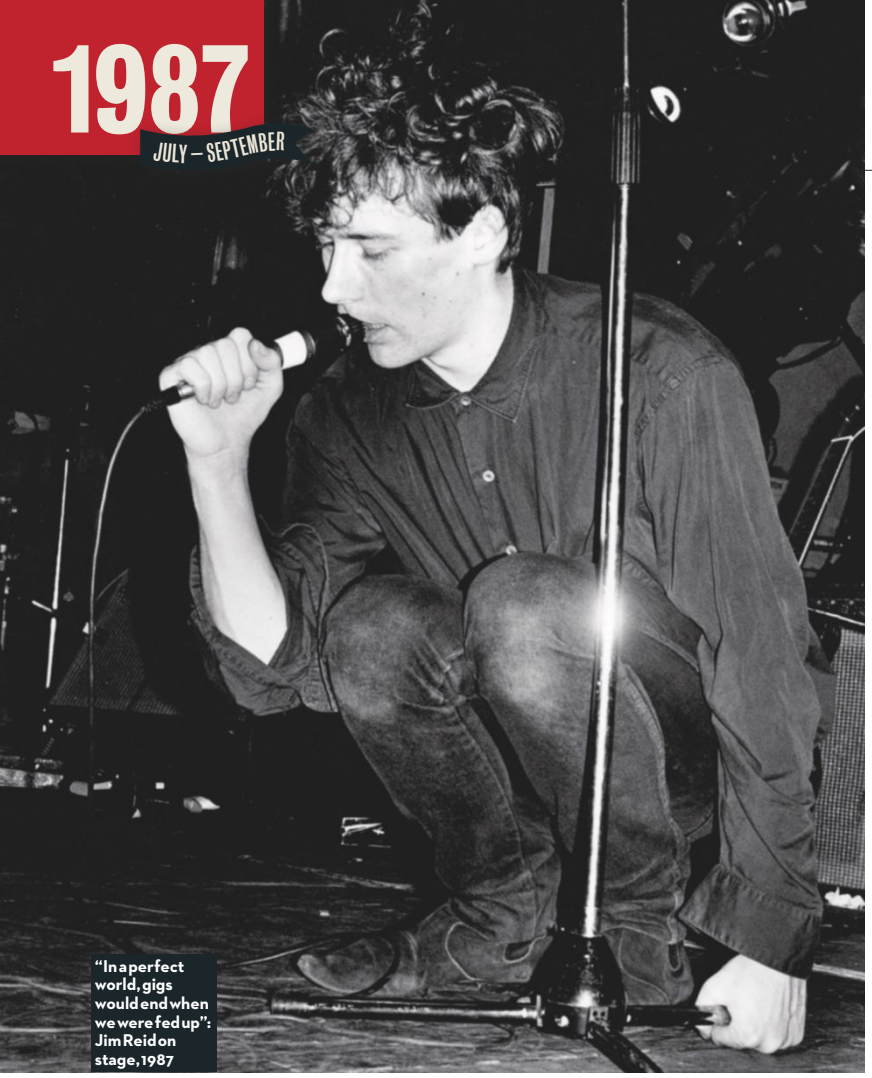
*Mat Smith* ●

LAWRENCE WATSON

**"He's become a recluse and I've become the pushy bastard": The Jesus And Mary Chain's Jim Reid (left) on his older brother William**

# "One of the sexiest groups"

**"We thought we were wonderful song-writers and everybody would recognise that, but nobody's taken us that way," complain THE JESUS AND MARY CHAIN. Now drug and riot-free, surely the new LP, *Darklands*, will bring people around?**



"In a perfect world, gigs would end when we were fed up": Jim Reid on stage, 1987

ALAN REEVELL

## — NME AUGUST 8 —

**JIM DOESN'T WANT** to talk about drugs.

"I'm pissed off with it. I don't like giving guys like Mike Smith a chance to point the finger at this group."

But everybody's got a good drug story.

"I used to take acid in East Kilbride and go down to this deserted factory, just smash the place up. One day, William came down and just went absolutely insane. He tried to kill me, to wring my neck and really strangle me. I can't describe what it was like; we were both tripping on what seemed like the strongest acid ever and he almost killed me. It's not a great thing to take, because there'd have been no group, I'd have been dead and he'd have been in prison.

"The other thing about acid is that music, any old shit, sounds brilliant. I remember watching Shakin' Stevens on TV, and he was singing a song about hot dogs and I'm going, 'I know exactly what he means.' My God, I've thought things like that before, I've really been there. Which is another good reason not to take drugs, it turns you into a complete dickhead."

William: "Yeah, I've taken acid once and I certainly wouldn't want to advocate it. It was an eight-hour nightmare and I'll never take drugs again."

Two years after the landmark *Psychocandy* LP, William Reid is in the throes of his first major fame crisis. As pop classicists, The Jesus And Mary Chain, the group he and his younger brother dreamed up in an East Kilbride bedroom, have been inspired by a whole range of sounds, looks and attitudes from pop's Hall Of Fame. Perhaps the lifestyles and phobias go as part of the package. Jim assures me it's no pose.

"It was never like this before. He's definitely withdrawn since we started the group; he's become a recluse and I've become the pushy bastard. He never ever goes to gigs or pubs or any sort of parties, nothing. He just sits in the house and does absolutely nothing or phones you up and has totally depressing conversations about how he's gonna kill himself.

"We've been all over the world and seen many strange and wonderful cities. All he sees is different hotels and TV sets. We had 10 days' holiday in Los Angeles and I don't think he and his girlfriend left the hotel room once."

Crippled '50s rocker Gene Vincent used to send stand-ins to fill dates on the Continent. In the '60s, Beach Boy Brian Wilson retired to compose in his sandbox while a succession of musicians took his place on tour. William recently made a similar suggestion.

Jim: "I thought it was a bit insane, but it was just the sort of thing that I expected him to say."

William: "I've never felt comfortable on stage, never. Playing live is the biggest contradiction; everything we do in the studio may sound spontaneous, but it's not, it takes time. I've always hated other people's songs played live too, I just hate gigs. When I tour I just become a zombie, I can't do anything a normal human being can, I can't get any grasp of a thread of humanity. Don't try and tell me it's any better than sitting at home and watching TV; you don't even get different types of food, you just get the same old shit. We were in Italy for a week and nobody even got any pasta or pizza, it was all fish and chips."

What do you fear most about being on tour?

William: "Being raped by a bunch of homosexual muggers in New York."

Jim: "I quite like the idea of that. We went to New York and everybody wanted to go out. He's locking himself in a room with a gun or something."

William: "What's really scary about New York is that there's all these fire escapes outside the hotel window. I'm always afraid that someone's going to break in."

*Psychocandy* may still stand as a delirious mix of disgust, anger and molten awe, but for both William and Jim, the wide-eyed innocence and raw thrills that launched it have now encountered ugly reality.

Jim: "When you get into this business, a lot of the mystery is blown. A lot of my favourite records I listen to in a different way now. I see them all sitting in a studio saying, 'Let's go home now, let's get a taxi.' I absolutely hate that – I'll never hear a record again in the same way I did three years ago."

William: "I'd like to make four or five albums and have enough money to say, 'Right, that's it.' If we could have just one massive-selling LP, I would quit. I hate this business. I'd like to just write songs, but there's always the feeling now that everything you do is part of your job. Every piece of art or film that you look at, every record you listen to, is going to inspire all your lyrics and music; it's a pretty horrible feeling."

This week, The Jesus And Mary Chain release a new single, "Happy When It Rains". With an upbeat swagger cut from the same cloth as "April Skies", it is but a taster for the panorama of foreboding and beauty to be found on the soon-come second album *Darklands*.

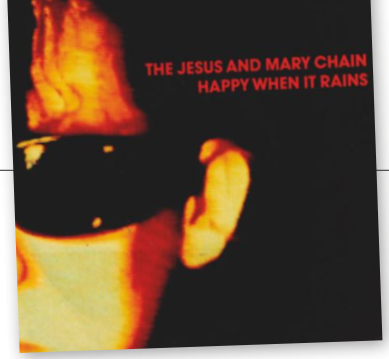
There has been no radical formula change, the innate talent for combining sweet, resonant melodies with a harshness of tone is still there, but gone is the feedback of old, allowing the Brothers Reid to explore new vistas in their soundscape. Emphasis now switches to William's genius guitar and some of the strangest lyrics in rock'n'roll. There's the celestial orgasm described in "Cherry Came Too", and the psychological and emotional entrapment of "On The Wall", a song built around a metronome of bass and cymbal, exploring parts of the Velvets other bands can't reach, with its powerful, punishing simplicity and central character who feels like a dog, or "*a clock on the wall*". Both "On The Wall" and the title track are sung, and I'd wager solely composed by, William Reid.

These songs alone set the recalcitrant, reclusive elder Reid apart from his contemporaries as perhaps the only present-day composer willing to use the pop song as a place for exorcising and confronting listeners with inner dread and personal demons. "Darklands" may be the finest song the Mary Chain have ever composed, and typically it's built around a paradox. As the guitar reaches the pinnacle of euphoric release, a voice breathes, "*I'm dying…*"

Whatever else you may think, it's a far cry from the benefit-minded, buoyantly optimistic strain presently enshrined in the pop charts and the stadium citadels of rock. We're sitting in a city pub, the Reids having a rare drink together. William claims he never drinks, and after two pints he starts to get tongue-tied. Jim, on the other hand, is on a bender: "I get pissed all the time. It's getting embarrassing. I'm turning into one of those people who have a drink problem."

Douglas Hart, the Mary Chain's third man who's been with them from the beginning but who has minimal creative input, uses the break in rehearsal time to hunt down a copy of Elvis Presley's "Reconsider Baby".

Circumstances have changed for the band since *Psychocandy*. They've moved to London, ditched Creation Records boss Alan McGee as their manager (his role partly being taken by the avuncular Geoff Travis, owner of both Rough Trade and their Warners-distributed label Blanco




Y Negro). Where *Psychocandy* was the product of three years' scheming and arguing as they plotted a brilliant escape from the stultifying boredom of dole life in Scotland, *Darklands* was made with the two separated and seldom seeing each other.

"You might say, why did it take two years for this album? The answer is, why shouldn't it? Do people not think it's strange how everybody in the music business writes the same amount of songs each year? They do it because it's what's expected, so they get their advance. That's why so many LPs only have about four good songs and the rest is filler.

"We could have done that, but if you're going to do something you should think about it and take time over it. To us, *Psychocandy* was like a greatest-hits LP. I hate saying this because I've said it millions of times, but to my taste it's the best record anybody has made in the past 15, maybe 20 years. Nobody has made anything like it before or since."

> "If we could have just one massive-selling LP, I would quit"

Such modesty must have had a bearing on releasing a follow-up.

Jim: "We started to get screwed up about not wanting to sound the same, that was the problem. It was so obvious what we were trying to do on *Psychocandy* that I knew what it was going to sound like before we'd done it; this time it wasn't clear what it was going to end up like. So we were chipping away at each other's ideas all the time and we recorded totally different versions of some of the songs. "On The Wall" was done half-a-dozen different ways and what we ended up with was reasonably unconventional for us."

They are loath to talk about their songs directly, but Jim admits that they often write separately, though the non-participant always gets a credit: "It's easier and it's the way we like to do it. We're brothers – if we weren't we'd probably poke each other's eyes out and demand publishing money."

William: "Sometimes I'll come to him with half an idea, like the way The Beatles used to work in the early days. John would write a song but couldn't get a chorus, so Paul would come up with something catchy."

Jim: "That's us, the Lennon and McCartney of the '80s. Actually, we've always been fucked up by that. We thought we were wonderful song-writers and everybody would recognise that, but nobody's taken us that way, people have focused on the guitars and the way the records were so out of the ordinary rather than considering the songs. We don't make records until there's something to record. I think a lot of people go into the studio with a producer, a few half-baked ideas and bash something out. What's really bad about that is that it works, it's successful for those people. You hear records that obviously haven't a song but God knows how many people are raving about it. That's kind of sad."

The dark climate of the new LP he puts down to their continued isolation and his brother's bouts of depression.

"When we lived in Scotland, my dad was made redundant, my mum worked in a shop. I really like my dad and all that, but it started to get really insane, with the three of us cooped up in a small house all day. If the group hadn't happened when it did, something very dramatic and nasty would have happened. It's horrible to say it, but we looked at them and said, whatever happens to us it won't be that. It may be as bad but it won't be the same.

"All through my life I've only had one or two close friends. Even now, I don't know that many people. It's not the way I want it to be either, but it's true.

"We spent a nine-month period doing absolutely nothing to do with the group; it was a really depressing time, we contemplated giving up."

William: "I think he can speak about the group better than me. There must be a psychological reason for it, but when somebody asks me what I think of myself I clam up. That must be the hardest question in the world to answer, and I feel the same way about the music.

"This isn't usual, I read interviews with songwriters every week and they're all queueing up to tell you what a song's about, how they wrote it, what they were doing at the time, what they were eating. I think, how can they do that, how can they analyse their songs?"

**JIM: "ANYBODY WHO** sits down and listens to the LP and reads the lyrics and has half an imagination will be able to figure out the sort of people we are."

In the meantime, we can surmise; words like serious, stubborn, confrontational spring to mind. But sexy? Are you sure, lads?

Jim: "On stage we're one of the sexiest groups you can imagine. Three or four reasonably young guys in leather rolling around showing their backsides to the audience. All I know is that we get tons of screaming young girls. If a gig doesn't have sex, there's something wrong. I think we're refined in our sexiness, huh huh. We're not pin-ups, but you don't have to be sexy."

William: "I never feel sexy on stage. I think you can only be sexy when you mime on a TV show – you can get your makeup on, do your hair and you don't even have to look at your guitar."

*Darklands*' release will be accompanied by a tour. William will be there, but all he's looking forward to is going to Bradford – "because it's got the most comprehensive photographic museum in Europe".

Jim regrets that the old 15-minute shambling riots on which their early infamy was based are no longer viable: "In a perfect world, gigs would end when we were fed up. But there's a promoter backstage with an iron bar and if you don't play 35 minutes he'll smash you over the head with it. I've been beaten with an iron bar, I've had the shit kicked out of me by security men. You begin to wonder what's the point.

"When we make a record, we do it solely to please ourselves; the compromise comes on stage when you have to take into account that you've got an audience to please. To me, some of our shows have been fantastic, we look exactly how groups should look. Groups shouldn't look sober or stand at the mikes and sing. Singers should roll on the ground and kick guitars. But that attitude isn't practical any more."

William: "I was watching that thing about U2 coming back to Ireland the other night. If we'd just played 40 dates in America and everyone was going, 'I love you, I love you', I'd just say fuck off. It's a human reaction. I don't ever want to become a perfect being to someone who likes our music. People like U2 have become saints to their fans, but I'm as shitty as anyone else, I couldn't ever be that responsible.

Jim: "If I got enough money, I'd like to build myself a big empire. I'm quite into power, to tell you the truth; I've got the energy for that. I don't mean like a small record company; I mean something at least as big as Rough Trade where I could bring out the sort of bands I liked and do my own stuff when I felt like it."

Perhaps The Jesus And Mary Chain's bedroom rock dream of a music that takes disaffection and alienation as its keynote is now hopelessly outmoded, in a world where pop music is all-pervasive and rock thrives on community populism. Their entry into mainstream acceptance has been accompanied by much doubt and disillusion.

"We always had this idea that lots of groups would start after us and they'd be brilliant. Instead there's half-a-dozen groups who've come along and sound like we did two years ago except not as good.

"I don't really know what position I'd like to be in. The funny thing is that you don't really know what it's going to be like until you've tried it. What I'm doing now is certainly a lot less fun than I thought it would be." *Gavin Martin* •

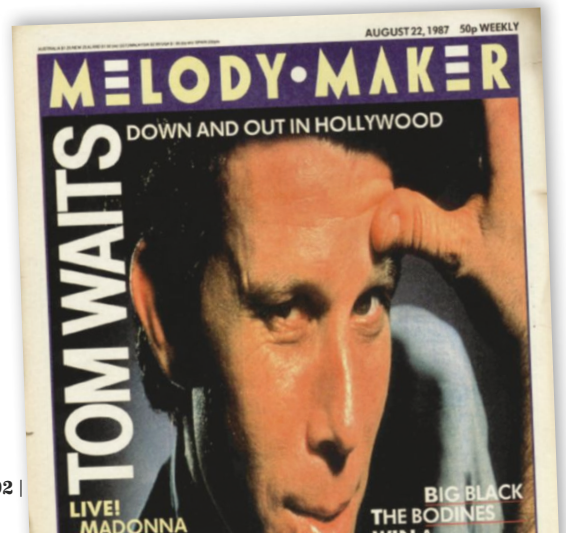
# "I live for adventure"

**Once a song, now a play and an album, *Franks Wild Years* occasions the return of TOM WAITS."I subscribe to my own personal mythology. I prefer to create my own country and live in it."**

— MELODY MAKER AUGUST 22 —

LAWRENCE WATSON

**THIS IS A** mystery story that could be told here and now:
**THE SET:** A seedy and once elegant deserted bar in East LA.
**THE CHARACTERS:** Tom Waits, a Chinese bartender, and me.
**THE DIALOGUE:** "You waiting for Tom?" asked the bartender. "He says he's coming real soon."
**THE DESCRIPTION:** The bartender, Leon, looks like a character from a Tom Waits song. The one where Charlie Chan's younger brother finds his sibling drunk in the gutter, pulls his socks up, and together they watch *Pinocchio* six times and solve a missing persons case.
**THE ACTION:** Leon tells me Tom drinks here all the time. He cleans the bar constantly without caring if the process will attract custom or not. I asked the bearded fellow for a story, some snippet about Waits that could be useful. His eyes lit up with excitement. He wanted to reveal something to me, something deep and dark, something secret. Just as he was about to divulge his priceless jewel, the door swung open…




## The story

**HE WALKED IN** limping. No, not limping, but it's painful, as though someone had overdone the starch in »

**"The ritual of music is like snake-charming, it's a delicate operation": Tom Waits in 1987**

his black jeans or his knees had been ossified by some exotic disease contracted in Southern Borneo.

**HE LOOKED** white, undercooked, almost raw, but still healthily clean shaven and bright-eyed.

**HE SAT** at an empty booth (not a difficult feat amidst the desolation), and immediately blended in perfectly with the surrounding scenery – the nicotine-stained wallpaper, the peeling stucco pillars, the hairline-fractured ceiling.

**HE SPOKE** just like he sang – with a Woodbine unfiltered growl, sucking in the atmosphere and glowing out intrigue.

"You're sitting where Jayne Mansfield used to sit," he mused, until the bottle of beer arrived. "In the good old days, this used to be quite a place – they all used to come here. It was the place to be."

I had, of course, planned this story weeks ago, long before I met the central character. But isn't that always true of classic fiction – a cross between futile misery and happy accident? Now there was no need for it anyway. It was all actually happening. My imagination could slumber while the rest of me went to the movies.

**The storyteller's story** (also titled "The End Of Bold Type").

**LAST YEAR WAITS** performed a play, *Frank's Wild Years*, at the Steppenwolf Theatre, Chicago. This much we know. The play, written by Waits and his wife, Kathleen, described the odyssey of Frank from bum to glittering star and back to bum again, with Tom playing and singing the lead role. The play was apparently not without its traumas: 10 days before opening night, they had to sack the director and junk the sets. Once up and running, one of the female leads kept free-associating and telling a different story "in the amusement park of her own imagination", and Waits had to pull the play back into shape by improvising in front of the nightly audience.

Now Waits has re-recorded the songs from the play on his new album – a theatrical interpretation of the music, or vice versa. The songs have been radically altered, but the essence of the drama remains the same.

"I was trying to write a dozen eggs to fit the story. Now the way the music has been worked on for the album is sort of a Frankenstein cannibalisation of the play's music. In some cases I tried to take at least pieces of the process of doing a play, and season the material – so I cut the songs open and installed a portion of the play. I hope they hang together – like chickens in the window. This plans to tour around the world, though not performing exclusively the new material.

"One day I'd like to tour with the play, but it creates huge problems. The machinery of a play is so intricate to do a whistle-stop tour; folding everything into a box every night is almost impossible. Just touring with the very fundamental elements of design is a problem. At the moment, I plan to go out on the road with kind of a Cuban nightmare band.

"It's strange, you write something down in a dark room and then people ask you to go to 50 cities and say what you said that night over and over again. It makes you very careful about what you say.

"There's something very old about the storytelling culture. In Sudan, people still make a living setting up in the marketplace. Even here, in a court, it's always the best storyteller who wins the case.

"The road is really hard, because you try and do roughly the same thing every night but you're always encountering inconsistencies. It makes me grumble a lot. It makes me impossible to live with."

Stories emanating from the studio maintain that Waits is not impossible, but extremely demanding…

"Yeah, to a degree I am. If you're working on something and you all feel part of the discovery process, it feels like an expedition. It's 'Dr Livingstone, I presume', and not 'Gentlemen, you'll be here at 9.30 in the morning with haircuts and ties'. All I ask for is a commitment to discovery. OOOPS."

ALBUMS REVIEW 1986

# Downtown visions

## MM AUG 29 Tom traces *Franks Wild Years* in song.

The bar's empty, the clock's working again and the lunatic Mico, despite rather too much egg nog, has resisted saying, "Tom Waits for no man." All that's left is an album, some songs, a little sleaze-flecked beauty.

These days when Island release a record it comes wrapped in a thousand attendant signifiers. This time round, the promotional pack includes a record, a 10-minute video and enough bits of paper to make you think they were applying for planning permission for a shed or something. At least there weren't any chicken bones dipped in blood.

The album's subtitle, "Un Operachi Romantico In Two Acts", sounds like it's going to be the first part of Linguaphone's Esperanto course, and indeed it's far-reaching vagueness begins to suggest that they wouldn't be far wrong. Tom sings, "*Kick me up Mount Baldy*," and you know it's going to be brilliant.

*Franks Wild Years* is an apostrophe-free story about Frank's rise from bar-room to cocktail lounge and all the way back again. Shorn of the visual assistance of the play, the little soundtracks to success are necessarily couched in the overwhelming flood of words. He may well raise his eyebrows or wear a big red nose all the way through, but for the purposes of this record we'll assume he's just being Frank again.

The first side chronicles the ascension as "Straight To The Top" comes over all rhumba, articulating a tragically innocent desire for better things. The air may be "*fresh and clean*" up there but the wind is full of broken glass.

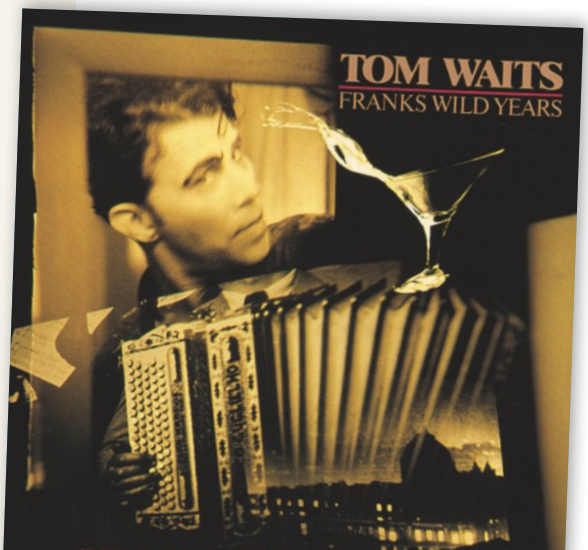
"Innocent When You Dream" takes up the theme, later to be used as a closing mumble with equal parts recognition and irony, but here a rumbustious bar-room bellow of collective hope.

As Frank staggers up the ladder, the songs become at once an entertainment shot through with a frighteningly assured fervour. "Way Down In The Hole" is the Man With X-Ray Eyes at his evangelical meeting, knowing that fame needs something to cling on to. Inevitably "Straight To The Top" takes on its Vegas shroud, all finger clicks and words as ways of filling up the silence. It's here that Waits gets to the dichotomy of his own motivations; does the luscious twist of language actually *mean* anything when you're parading this grandly grubby self-mythology?

**Frank finds himself a bum again, using a language of languid nostalgia**

"I'll Take New York" is the summit, recalling another Frank taking Hoboken dreams and smothering them with equally tragic misguided importance. "*Someday they'll have to name a street after me.*" Is *that* all there is to the sweetness of fame? Heaven becomes a metropolis; the country starts to fade and the only good mountain is 40 floors of air-conditioning. You just know somebody's going to start crying. "*I fell down at the derby/And now the night's black as a crow.*" So Frank finds himself a bum again, using a language of languid nostalgia that Waits seems most comfortable with. *Franks Wild Years* is the end of the trilogy and the start of a new road.

Whether Waits will stick to the downtown visions or embellish his character with the surreal obsessions that seem to envelop his world these days is going to be a significant decision. He's up where the air is clear but somewhere under the clouds there's a long drop. Wild years indeed. *Paul Mathur*



Waits discovers part of the booth coming away in his hand.

"Oh dear, what would Jayne say?"

"Oh dear, my chair is collapsing", probably.

What a woman!

He keeps a notebook of other recent discoveries in his pocket. The names scribbled down include Ted Hughes' *Crow*, John McCormick, Brave Combo, Gene McDaniels, Irma Thomas, Mahalia Jackson, Brunello Del Montochino ("He does a whole thing with snakes and lighter fluid") and Augustina Lowra ("sort of a Mexican Chopin").

"You just look for something you recognise. If you recognise it, you gotta figure there's something in it of you, that maybe you broke off the same log. When I get into a studio, I get interested in what Keith Richards calls the hair in the gate – like when you're watching a movie. The ritual of music is like snake-charming. It's a delicate operation, to not pull the wings off the butterfly. You can own something that doesn't really belong to you. You can be in charge of something and have absolutely no control over it whatsoever."

*Franks Wild Years* follows the same serpentine trail of *Swordfish Trombones* and *Rain Dogs*, but moves in even more surreal, oblique orbits, transcribing dreams of innocence into palpable nightmares of experience, leaving the scent of melancholy hot under the collar. It is the closest thing to sipping Jack Daniel's spiked with nitro-glycerine.

"The albums are different, but they're also the same, a part of each other." He pauses and leans forward to stress the importance of what's to come. "These songs all belong to me. All the other songs belong to two guys in the Bronx."

Sorry?

"I think I'd better just leave it at that."

At what?

"Stromboli. The others belong to Stromboli."

The owner of the freak show Pinocchio was forced to work in?

"Uh-huh."

The door slams shut, still riddled with riddles. Waits' heroes derive from what used to be treated as the disposable class, the cannon fodder.

"Who is the fodder of that cannon?"

Now, like cans of Coke, these people are seen to be recyclable. In the harsh light of middle-American consumerism, they are the refuse side-effects of a buoyant economy, yet in the twilight vistas of The Waitsland, these characters shine with the individuality that marks the outsider.

"We're all going to be dirt in the ground. Globally, I keep waiting for the world to rear up and scrape us all off its back. I believe it's really a living thing, but things aren't over until the fat lady sings. Until you've really got to know people, you can't tell what they've lost or found, or located, or dismissed, or embrace. I deal in the things I see, then fracture, dismantle, and then reorganise them."

"I like to be disorientated": Waits on the illuminating "wrong turns" his life takes

LAWRENCE WATSON

> "The albums are different but also the same, a part of each other"

**IN THE WAITSLAND,** characters must lose something to find something, be stripped of clothes before finding their suit of salvation. It is, in fact, the very religious idea of baptism by fire, paradise through purgatory.

"If you go looking for something, in many cases you come back with something very different than you set out to find. I try to contemplate the many mysteries of life, but in most cases they remain mysteries. I discover a lot of things by making the wrong turn and getting lost. I like to be disorientated."

Even the tattoos on Waits' arm bear testimony to the idea of beauty through pain: the bad bird he had done when he was drunk in LA and touched up when sober in Singapore, the words written in Buffalo, the heart, and the name of his wife, all reinforce the idea of ritual.

"I'm a citizen of the world," he offers with sarcastic relish.

"I live for adventure and to hear the lamentations of the women. I subscribe to my own personal mythology. I prefer to create my own country and live in it."

In this land, time can be telescoped, inverted, dismembered, tortured and restored. Waits has moved backwards to move forwards – moving from blues, through samba, rhumba, Ferris-wheel cha-cha, spaghetti western, gospel, conjuring up an atmosphere of wind-up gramophones, opulent decadence and tragic glamour. His sources have become more distant, yet the music is more intimate.

"I didn't really think of it as anything nostalgic," he retorts, lighting another cigarette. Frank, however, does delve into the well of history and exhumes a myriad of ghosts from the past.

"If a ghost ever gets inside you, do you know what to do?"

Can't say that I do.

"Pee your pants." »

Thanks.

"Remember I told you that. Could be useful one day. Ghosts don't like it when you pee."

Something about urine that offends them?

"No, I'm serious. They won't stay in you." His eyes look wounded, before wielding a hint of mischief.

"If you see a ghost, then you can go behind a tree."

Saves on the laundry bills.

"Are you taking this seriously?"

Of course. LA is like an obese 40-year-old spreadeagled across a leather waterbed. I had just travelled from the toenail to the left armpit in a state of petrified horror. There's been at least one freeway shooting per day since the third week of June, the crazies are everywhere. Now we're alone, safe, and I'm prepared to believe anything.

"That's the pressure of modern urban living. I've seen a couple of ghosts. They're like porpoises – they come to the surface of whatever dimension they live in and then dive back. Almost like sewing with a needle. Once I saw a Spanish galleon when I was a boy, with a full crew. It was off the coast of Mexico and no one else saw it but me. It came dangerously close to me and then disappeared into a fog bank.

"One night when I was driving and was lost, I was making all these wrong turns and I saw a warrior on a horse. I was trying to get found again when this Napoleon-type figure reared up in front of my car with a sabre and then vanished into the forest."

Waits has gone to bed dreaming of ghosts, sabres and galleons, but only wakes up in a cold sweat when thinking about lawyers, life insurance and whether or not to make a will.

"I'm also afraid of air turbulence, sensible shoes and fountain pens."

What's wrong with fountain pens?

"Have you got one?" He edges away from the edge until I tell him no.

"See? You're afraid of them too."

Frank bears a resemblance to Tom, but it is only fleeting. There is a part of Frank in all of us, but not much of Tom in anyone. In telling Frank's story, Waits has hit on a central nerve of the American nightmare – going broke. In a land where money maketh man, not having money is literally a fate worse than death.

It is hardly surprising that people find a song like "I'll Take New York" annoying, disturbing. It wretches from the underbelly of Vegas Sinatra and sounds like Jerry Lewis on the Titanic; a narcotic nightmare with its pants round its ankles. Yet, as the reprise of "Innocent When You Dream" chimes through Time Square, there is hope, the cycle has recycled and Frank is once again a successful failure.

"There are people who are a success at being a failure and people that are a failure at being a success."

Which are you?

"I don't know. Both… maybe. Success is on your own terms and is very difficult. It requires constant maintenance. In most post-industrial cities in America there is the definite idea that we are living among the dead, only sometimes the distinctions are blurred.

"People want things thrown into greater relief, and money can show where you are. We don't know too much. Where is the edge of the world? Where is that minefield?"

Columbus, Dr Livingstone, in fact all previous explorers have eroded the thrill and the danger of the unknown. Yet the more things are known, the less they are understood, and Waits is determined to keep safe the explorers' legacy.

"I think about that sometimes. There are still places where nobody's been. There's still danger out there. There are still places where vultures can play pool with your eyeballs.

"When I was a kid, I had all these Mexican friends and we used to go out into the desert and bury ourselves up to our necks in the sand and wait for the buzzards to come down. When they got within a couple of feet of us, we'd reach out and grab them by the necks and snap their heads off. It was just a little game, a kid's game, like jacks or hopscotch."

His laconic drawl emphasises the matter-of-fact delivery while carefully submerging the facts of the matter.

"We used to get picked up by the police all the time. It used to thrill me, not frighten me. I enjoyed that when I was a kid. It got my heart going. Then I became invisible…"

Our eyes met – one pair screaming, "Believe me, asshole", the other pair saying, "You must be kidding."

"It's really the secret to avoiding the police. Literally invisible."

How?

"You send me $200 and I'll write out the incantation. You have to dip chicken bones in menstrual blood and shave your head. It's a long process."

Does it come with a money-back guarantee?

"Yup."

The cheque's in the post.

"Alright, start saving guitar strings and pigeon feathers." He looks around at the clock and starts motioning with his hands. "I'm just checking the time… because, well, I've got to check the time."

The time was 4.27pm.

"I was going to give you 20 minutes, but well… I caught a mustang when I was seven. I was struck by lightning when I was 10 years old. It burned my underpants right off, but everything else stayed intact. Where are we?"

I'm completely lost.

"Oh yeah, broke. When I was little, my dad and I used to go fishing out on the rocks. One day he cut open an oyster and inside found a black pearl. He put it in his cheek to keep it safe. We fished all day. We'd just lost the house and he had a business that had gone sour and we had no money, and I was taken out of school and we were moving around a lot. I thought it would be worth half-a-million dollars. As we fished throughout the day, I quietly reconstructed our future.

"When we got back to the shore at the end of the day, my dad took the pearl out of his cheek and it had shrivelled to nothing. It was just a seed, it hadn't formed properly. That was rough.

"I caught a bullet in my teeth when I was 17 years old. It was a dare. It's all timing. And good fillings. You just have to bite down at the right time. Of course, the odds are pretty much against you. That was when I was younger, when I thought I was going to live forever. I'm not ready to play a harp yet. I've still got back taxes to pay off. I can't remember the last time I did something dangerous. Oh yeah, I stole a black jockey off someone's lawn with a hacksaw. Just sawed through in broad daylight."

Uh, why?

"I'm part of the Black Jockey Foundation. It's an organisation kind of like the boy scouts."

Waits is a natural witness with a novelist's eye. The key to his success is anonymity. After his previous forays in the world of film – *Rumblefish*, *The Cotton Club* and last year's surprisingly successful *Down By Law* – Waits was able to remain invisible, but now he is starring in William Kennedy's *Ironweed* – a major Hollywood extravaganza directed by Hector *Kiss Of The Spiderwoman* Bebenco and starring luminaries like Meryl "Actress" Streep and Jack "Method" Nicholson. Waits plays Rudy, the terminally ill cancer hobo, a part seasoned thespians like Dennis Hopper and Harry Dean Stanton also auditioned for, and were turned down.

> "I caught a bullet in my teeth when I was 17"

"I went to New York under my own steam. They thought I was right for the part, so I got it." He looks down at his legs, examining the starch. "If it's a big hit, it could be time for an operation. Plastic surgery, so I could look like Joe Louis.

"There are people that go heavily into the metaphysics of shape shifting and character exploration, to the point where it's almost like summoning up the dead. I just work on relaxation. You gotta love the film business. You have to do it like you need the money. It's like being in an orchestra.

"I worked with some great people. Jack in particular helped me a lot. I was so nervous. I learnt a lot from the experience, though it takes some time to get acclimatised. It's like school – they give you a towel and a locker and you get on with it. In plays you actually take off and leave the ground. You don't get that feeling doing film. The drama process is very long but you're dealing with basic things – light, words, wood. There's no prestidigitation."

Waits looks up to see if I understand the word. I wonder how a word claiming to mean sleight-of-hand can be such a mouthful.

# Show of the year

**MM NOV 28** Waits rolls into town, dispenses non sequiturs to blindly adoring crowds.

HAMMERSMITH ODEON LONDON
LIVE!
NOVEMBER 22

Waits on stage: caught up in a character of his own making

**"ENGLAND'S THE ONLY** place where you can buy wigs and novelties." He says this with his head upside down and his feet the right way up. This is the best bit.

Oh, the stories, the stories. He's sitting at the piano like he's just about to lead it into the bathroom or the bedroom or the marriage guidance counsellors, and he's telling us about a soldier in the Civil War.

"Someone shot him and the bullet went right through his testicles and into this 18-year-old girl's ovaries, impregnating her. They never knew each other's names. Some call it intercourse, but I wouldn't."

I don't know whether I'd really call Tom Waits' show intercourse, although by the waving of heads and earnest nods from the folk around me, there's a huge audience for his peep-show teases. The young fellow next to me looked like the sort of chap who'd think that Wild Turkey was what you had at a hick Christmas dinner, but wept at Waits' cleverly concealed dramas. Curious.

It's hard to get caught up in the tales. As someone whose life is getting increasingly like a Tom Waits song, I warmed to the line about "*fast women and slow horses and other unreliable sources*", but found most of the appeal in the detachment, the vicarious pleasure of seeing all these nasty things happen to somebody else. No one would want to be Waits, not even Waits himself.

The set hovered mainly around the *Franks Wild Years* concept, roughly shadowing the album and play's storyline. Halfway through, he dons a tux and splatters moist irony across the audience, his glorious absurdity inevitably being lost on most of the dolts. When he mentioned free cigars, a whole row throbbed with restless anticipation.

"A Christmas Card From A Hooker In Minneapolis" was as touching a moment as any, investing all those romantically degenerate references with a genuine beauty. You wonder whether he ever cries at night, then you wonder whether it matters. He probably does and it probably doesn't, but caught up in the character of his own making, he's not letting on.

The necessity of playing to such a large venue meant that any sense of intimacy had to be caricatured, magnified, into a slurry unreality. He plays the fool and the bum and the prophet somewhere down the end of the tunnel, waving his arms about and scraping the spittle from his neatly messy shirt. "I've been raking leaves all day. I've never seen so many fucking leaves in all my life."

The backing band maintain a polite discipline as the focus flips into stupor. He raises his head to the heavens and grins that grin, then he's gone. Show of the year, in case you're worried. *Paul Mathur*

"That's one of the problems with film. Until the tools of film become more readily available, and affordable, the financing of a film will remain as much an art as anything. With music, you can still go to a pawn shop, buy a saxophone and GO."

Waits could finance his own films, partly through advertising. Ever the outsider, he remains steadfastly opposed to this venal idea, seeing it as a Faustian pact that would eclipse his future.

"I really hate the people that do them. I've been asked to endorse everything from underwear [lightning resistant] to cigarettes. I turned them all down. They cut bacon off your back before the pig is a ham. A lot of people go to Japan to do it, as though you can shit out in the desert and no one will know. The lines are drawn, they have to be, as advertising is aligning itself with new countercultures. It puts decals on your work.

"The idea is to be sovereign independent and not to have to work on 'Maggie's Farm', but there are people who should know better buying into a piece of the rock with assholes like Bob Hope. Why do you want that kind of money? It's money that uses you as a sperm to fertilise the egg of the industry. I prefer a beer taste on a champagne budget!"

The Waitsland moves in and out of focus with the rest of the music world. His wife keeps him aware, if not informed, of any seismic shifts near the pop volcano. And, as if to prove his currency, Waits asks after The Pogues. I tell him they're still drunk and he seems content.

"I sent Shane a bunch of money to try and get his teeth fixed."

I don't think it arrived.

"Probably sent it to the wrong address. That guy's smile looks like the South Bronx."

**WE'RE BACK TO** the mystery of the two guys and Stromboli. Still no answers. Waits' own future remains uncertain. There are no plans for future films, future plays or future albums (although "it'll be something with feathers").

"I don't want to rest on my laurels. There are things I've done that I don't mind too much. I can use them… some of them. There are things that are like mosquitoes. Some songs are made of mud, some are made of iron, and some of wood. When it rains, they react differently.

"When I start to know what I'm doing I start to get nervous. Eventually you arrive at an impasse. The records up to *Swordfish*… left me that way. I had to put on scuba gear and find a way out. I think this new album marks the end of another phase."

Waits then tells me he can open a beer bottle with his eye, but I can't afford his performance fee.

Yeah, Tom Waits – everything you wanted him to be and more: circus freak, ringmaster, clown, verbal acrobat, outlaw, outsider, and… the mystery remains unsolved, for the moment. Or maybe it's here somewhere, hidden between the dashes and dares. The bar is still vacant as Waits gets up to leave, hat in hand, hand on heart. I gaze up at the clock, which has stopped, probably in sympathy with the rest of the furniture.

When I look up again, he's vanished, into the ozone.

The door had been bolted, and still was. It works! Leon the bartender stops polishing the bar for a moment and shrugs his shoulders as if to say, "I told you so. You people never listen."

That's the trouble with storytelling these days. No one ever believes them. *Ted Mico* •

GETTY

BRIAN RASIC / GETTY

**"Forget my tits": Madonna's Who's That Girl Tour hits the UK, August 1987**

# The greatest array of images in pop

**NME AUG 22** Madonna silences Yorkshire beer boys during light drizzle.

**EVER BEEN TO** the pictures with 80,000 people and the biggest carry-out in the history of Hollywood? Well this was it. The golden years of cinema drowned in a sea of Tetley's, as Madonna – the *Halliwell's Guide* to pop – swaggered through a meticulously scripted set that was more to do with musicals than music.

Marlene Dietrich, George Raft and even Dorothy from *The Wizard Of Oz* came to Leeds, desperately seeking Susan, and dutifully performing bit parts in a pop extravaganza which sent soundwaves round the massive Roundhay Park.

It was a night for familiar entertainment rather than experiment. One of those comforting concerts where most people know the songs and are glad they sound the way they do on record.

But a series of back projections, including a patriarchal portrait of the Pope during "Papa Don't Preach" and a barrage of Coney Island trivia during the finale of "Holiday", showed Madonna to be a woman of substance, who can manipulate the codes of visual music. Look before you leap to conclusions, because this show used images to defamiliarise the music.

She opened the proceedings with "Open Your Heart", "Lucky Star" and "True Blue", emphasising her hi-energy nasal drawl, a vocal posture which is meant to signify the sassy attitudes of New York City, but may well be the result of touring the world in that painful leotard. With the hyper-ironic "Dress You Up", Madonna threw on an outfit that looked like jumble-sale gear stolen from the back of Edna Everage's closet, and immediately turned meaning on its head.

Bursting into "Material Girl" and a burlesque dance routine which featured a Nazi salute, some comic goose-stepping and a pair of panto knickers, her self-lacerating voice was having a dig at the critics and her public image.

Suddenly, dollars were thrown into the air and she shifted from mock materialism to welfare socialism, interrupting the flow of her songs to calm the audience down. As more people fainted at the front, the pleas for peace became increasingly more desperate. All the theories about the material tart with the diminishing heart of gold disintegrated, the momentum of the concert wavered and a star was brought down to earth. For a few brief seconds, Madonna became Louise Ciccone, an ordinary woman seriously scared that there might be a death.

**You can cast doubt on Madonna's voice, but never the strength of her identity**

Madonna may have the greatest array of visual images in modern pop, but she's not a particularly good singer. On the contrary, the further she moves away from her origins, the more she trembles. She is at her best when dealing with the languages of dance music, creating persistent musical highs, posing like a Funhouse baby, urging the Yamaha syn-drums to faster and more energetic beats.

She comes alive when the disco power of "Into The Groove" recreates Madonna as the club girl and suppresses all those film characters she imagines we want her to be. The triumph of Madonna comes packaged in echoing vocoder chants of "*Take it to the bridge*", the nagging salsa percussion, and the neat way that "Like A Virgin" segues into The Four Tops' "I Can't Help Myself".

So how come she deluded herself that the melodramatic ballad "Live To Tell" is her scene? Crumpling around in a heap of spent emotions, weird noises and abstract shapes, this is the Madonna I can do without. *Who's That Girl*? The one who's writhing about like a street kid in search of East Village arthouse emotions.

Give me the real Madonna, the dance Madonna, the one who stampedes her way through hi-energy, the one who rapes the whole of Hollywood in the name of club music and the one who can coax the drawers off a monk.

You can cast doubt on her voice, but never the strength of her identity; the flirting disco poser has become Madonna Maximus, a tiny blonde with enough peroxide bottle to silence the noisiest bitter-men in Yorkshire.

"I want you guys to keep me warm," she told the crowd, as cold clouds and light rain settled over the park. But her theatre of images had already sent enough heat round the auditorium to refuel the stations of power and desire. She played the virgin-whore dilemma before our eyes, there was a trio of homo-erotic dancers and Felix (paedophilia in a pork-pie hat) touched up his sister.

The lads at the front of the stage kept chanting, "Get your tits out for the boys", which in the circumstances was a fairly dull and unimaginative fantasy. But the dominatrix of pop teased them, then suddenly flexed her wit and screamed back, "Forget my tits, they belong to me."

With one vicious flash of her Stanley knife Madonna won the fight, and Leeds united – the crew we love to fear – were on an express train to Castration Junction. *Stuart Cosgrove*

ROUNDHAY PARK
LEEDS
LIVE!
AUGUST 15

# "The myths you know are true"

**Nocturnal. Amusing. A fan of fast cars and inscrutable postcards. Andrew Eldritch explains the mighty return of THE SISTERS OF MERCY, and his reputation as the Godfather Of Goth. "I dispute that," he says. "That's like saying Christ is responsible for the Mormons."**

— MELODY MAKER SEPTEMBER 5 —

HELLO?

"Thin White Duck here."

Who?

"Andy."

...Andy?

"Eldritch."

Oh... uh ... hi, Eldritch.

"Come for drinks."

When?

"Now."

I can't, I'm asleep. It's seven in the morning.

"Is it?... Oh... Coffee then."

Later.

"Sure. Kensington. My hotel. At 10."

OK... Uh, you haven't been to sleep yet, have you?

"When... this week? This month?"

After the gig.

"Uh... no. Went to Dingwalls with Lemmy and these Hell's Angels and..."

Save it, Eldritch. Save it. See you later. »

Andrew Eldritch and his most recent recruit to The Sisters Of Mercy, Californian Patricia Morrison, formerly of The Gun Club

**AH, THOSE WERE** the days. Cryptic phonecalls at all hours. The Sisters Of Mercy at the Royal Albert Hall, a heavy black nectar of irony that looked certain to choke goth on its own bittersweet excesses. *First And Last And Always*, the album out on Merciful Release through Warners and nights sat up in hotels with Eldritch in his manky black leather cowboy hat doing wilful bodily harm to our fragile metabolisms and rattling on at mutual cross-purposes; me about life'n'love'n'that, Eldritch, of course, about fencing and self-defence and the iron bar he carried up the sleeve of his coat for dextrous use in the possibility of attack.

The world was spinning at Eldritch's pace and it was spinning very, very fast. There were great conspiracies and greater paranoia. He even offered to take someone out of my life by offering them a job on the Sisters' road crew for a tour of America – a job he could hardly refuse and which he might not survive. Some friend. Some hero.

And then… well, those postcards. One from Mexico which read, "ELVIS IS DEAD. I know because he told Me. Sorry to break it so bluntly, but you had it coming, hippie. Feed your head – when you can find it. Von Eldritch X." There was a PS: "Peyote girls go round the outside, round the outside."

There were others from Hamburg, the last of which was written in Chinese, and I wasn't the only one who feared for the great man's sanity. Rumour had it a combination of devastated health, legal binds and sheer disappointment that his ex-henchman had made a go of The Mission had laid Eldritch near-fatally low. We presumed the world and Eldritch, to all intents and purposes, had parted company. Such miserable unbelievers!

Filming the video for the second single from *Floodland*, "Dominion", in Petra, Jordan

**ELDRITCH IS IN** a photographic studio, glistening with baby oil and draped all over Patricia, ex of The Gun Club and now his "right-hand man". He's here to pose with cigarettes and prove The Sisters Of Mercy are still a force to get wrecked with.

He doesn't talk of resurrection, but of continuation, and as if to insist megalomania is alive and well and ready to pistol-whip pop, his new single is called "Corrosion", lasts 11 minutes, features a 40-piece choir multitracked 10 times and was produced by Meat Loaf's old buddy and master of the Wagnerian, Jim Steinman. I'm about to ask him why but I'm laughing too much. The Bad News [A Spinal Tap-style band featuring members of BBC comedy *The Young Ones*] mondo-metal version of "Bohemian Rhapsody" has just come on the in-house cassette and Patricia thinks it's The Cult!

Let's talk over eats, Eldritch. Where d'you fancy?

"Oh, anything but Indian."

Really? I thought you'd be a man for a ruby.

"No, I refuse to eat anywhere they beat us at cricket."

Italian then?

"Italian."

Where have you been since you last appeared in the hallowed pages of the *Maker*?

"Well, we went through the corporate wars in my familiar Jonathan E-type role and we did OK. A lot of untruths have been bandied about those times, but unfortunately the way we won makes it tricky for us to explain how we did it, and therefore prove that we did. It was basically over the name – the people that are now The Mission and myself had an agreement no one would use the name when the band went its separate ways. But after they'd been touting their demos round getting nowhere under all sorts of other names, they began to claim rights to it, which patently had to be stopped.

"And when they wanted to be called The Sisterhood, there was nothing I could do but be The Sisterhood before them – the only way to kill that name was to use it, then kill it. I think that reflected rather badly on the name The Sisters Of Mercy, and it's probably due for reinstatement for that reason if no other.

"Then there was a little disagreement with the publishers, RCA Music, over what would happen to the money. Effectively it all kept us out of action."

Was it frustrating to see The Mission become successful in the meantime?

"No, because they're not doing something I'd like to do, and they're certainly not doing it in the way I'd like to do it. Anybody could go out and be The Alarm or The Cult, which is exactly what they've done."

You don't see them as a legacy of The Sisters Of Mercy at all, then?

"No… I mean, they took the interest and capitalised on that, but musically, no. It was noticeable for about a year that they couldn't get press unless they mentioned my name. I saw interviews with myself so many times by proxy – that got irritating because… well, Wayne has a *remarkable* way with the truth."

Is there bitterness between you, then?

"Yeah. Yeah, there is."

Personal or corporate?

"Personal."

You suggest there's a fundamental difference in *attitude* between The Sisters Of Mercy and The Mission.

"Yeah, their ability to bend over forwards in order to make progress appals me. The way they've bent over contracts and been appropriately assaulted for it – which, again, is something they've not really been prepared to let on about.

"Musically, too. I never sang a lyric of Wayne's. I never found one I *could* sing."

History has proved that, when the Sisters disappeared from public view, was exactly the time you should have been reaping your greatest rewards. What, other than legalities, prompted your inaction?

"Well, I wasn't well. I'd done three tours that year and I thought we'd come to the end of a logical course. I titled that Royal Albert Hall gig 'Wake' about four months before it actually happened, and the band are probably still wondering why. I mean, I thought it should still have gone on, but I knew it wasn't going to.

"The last time we actually spent any time together, at the end of the tour before the Albert Hall, we had some time playing in America and then we had a week off in Los Angeles. I went to Mexico for the day and the other two couldn't think of anything better to do than go to Disneyland. And when I got back from Mexico a week later, having got somewhat… uh… distracted, I thought, 'God, what are these people whingeing about, really?' They just got so feeble. Then they said, 'Well, OK, what are we gonna do for new songs?' And I said, 'How about this, this and this', and unfortunately the first 'this' I cited had too many chords per minute and Craig said, 'If that's the guitar line, I'm not playing it,' and walked out. That was really that.

"But Wayne had already become a problem because he wanted to do more of his songs and I thought they were particularly vacuous. I used to have to fight with him to get the songs to make any sort of grammatical sense, let alone be sharp with it.

"I mean, you've gotta know grammar before you can work away from it. The guy didn't have a clue – he'd just string buzz words together."

Strangely enough, someone from the *Maker* was around Wayne while he was writing recently and he had a book of aphorisms with all the mystical-type ones underlined in red.

"That's how most people do it. I can't bring myself to work that way. That's what passes for revolution these days. I'm glad I wasn't around in '86, because it wasn't just The Mission, it was a bad year all over and anyone who broke then will be tainted with it for a long, long time."

But surely you're responsible. You introduced a generation of synth-pop fashion fops to the thrill of anti-fashion, "When The Levee Breaks", outlaw biker chic and drug innuendo and guitars and ripped jeans and dry ice. Without the Sisters and the vacuum you created when you went to ground, there could scarcely have been grebo and Zodiac Mindwarp.

"I dispute that. That's like saying Christ is responsible for the Mormons – it's really not on. I don't know what you lot were left with. So what's grebo rock?"

You really haven't heard it?

"No. Is it like Led Zeppelin?"

Well… yeah… fake… fantasy-on-the-edge stuff.

"Oh, without the grunge. Maybe I *should* have taught them outrageousness."

You sound like the Godfather Of Goth.

"Ha! When we were trying to sell 'Corrosion' to Steinman, we told him it was like the high point of a Borgias disco evening and he went for it. Nobody makes gloriously stupid records nowadays."

Queen.

"No, they're embarrassing. Steinman and I are the only two who share this glorious stupidity. Don't tell him, though. He just thinks 'Corrosion' is perfectly normal. Other bands have no perspective on the stupidity of it all. They say things like, 'Oh well, we never claimed we were original,' or, 'Well, of course rock's stupid', but it's just spiel, it's just Eldritch lines misunderstood."

Surely this is where the attitude comes into it. The difference between the Sisters and the pretenders to the throne is irony-in-overdrive, an irony that takes the piss out of *and* celebrates its role models.

"If you do it right, it compounds itself at every level. 'Corrosion' is an enrichment of bombast – there was no other way to do it."

A lot of old Sisters fans will say, "He's taking the piss."

"Well, of course I'm taking the piss – it's the only way to be serious about it. Same as it ever was."

> "You have to acknowledge the medium in the message"

So this is crap *and* fantastic. It's time we redefined the difference between man and beast. It's nothing to do with how many legs you walk on; it's everything to do with the possession of irony. I know people who are animals.

"And I had a cat that had a very highly developed sense of irony."

"Corrosion" is already being compared to some pretty godlike things. One of them is the Stones' "You Can't Always Get What You Want".

"That's cool."

So it's pop about pop.

"That's a very important element, yeah. You have to acknowledge the medium in the message, I think, or else you're stupid… dishonest…or just very naive."

In a sense, your attitude was a precursor to sampling. You were acknowledging Led Zeppelin before the Beastie Boys *used* them. Is their physical, literal approach even more honest than yours?

"I think that's a lower level, a very vulgar interpretation. In about two years' time I'll cover 'When The Levee Breaks' and wipe the floor with the Beastie Boys and wipe the floor with The Cults because they haven't got a grip on what is great about Led Zeppelin. It's like The Mission going out and covering Sisters' music, they just make it sound like bad Echo And The Bunnymen.

"I remember I want to see The Alarm when they were knee-high to Big Country and I thought, 'These people have *completely* misunderstood Mott The Hoople', and it's been happening ever since. I'm now used to people misunderstanding me, though it's weird when you get all these ersatz Eldritch clones out there treading the boards."

You've never seen Fields Of The Nephilim?

"No. I'm told we played with them once in San Francisco, but I wasn't actually there when they played."

Patricia: "They knew I was there and afterwards they came up and started talking to people next to me. I just left, I wasn't even going to speak to them. I mean, for a moment when they were on, I turned and thought, 'This is familiar, what's this?'"

"The only reason that people like that embarrass me so much is that, if they're really that hooked on me, they must be tasteless. It gets to the stage where you think, 'I'm not *that* good, and anyone who thinks I am must be an idiot.'

"They haven't got a grip, but there's an inner integrity and authority in 'Corrosion' which comes of pain, grief and suffering. I couldn't do what The Mission are doing, I couldn't do what The Cult are doing, I couldn't do what the Beastie Boys are doing, I couldn't do what Madonna is doing, I could do what Alice Cooper did, but I'm not extrovert enough. I would have no scruples about doing it if I were able to. There's an acknowledgement there that you don't find in other, smaller vulgarisms.

"And if it takes a year fighting corporate wars in order to be able to do it with integrity, then I'll do it… or not at all. I don't *have* to do this."

Don't you have a touching belief that the role of a recording artist is a reason to be intelligent and communicative, and isn't that belief extraordinarily old-fashioned?

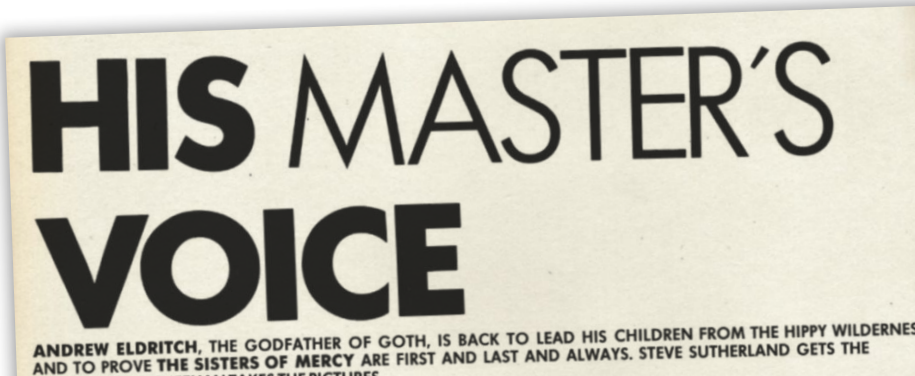
"Yeah, and self-destructive."

So you're fighting a rearguard action.

"Or vanguard, depending on how you look at it."

I hope history proves you right.

"I hope so too, because I don't think this irony compounds itself properly unless you do add an extra layer on the top, unless you do mix something worthwhile in." »


HIS MASTER'S VOICE

ANDREW ELDRITCH, THE GODFATHER OF GOTH, IS BACK TO LEAD HIS CHILDREN FROM THE HIPPY WILDERNES AND TO PROVE THE SISTERS OF MERCY ARE FIRST AND LAST AND ALWAYS. STEVE SUTHERLAND GETS THE

Don't we need a new era of innocence? Don't we need to *unlearn* how to progress?

"No, we need a new era of cynicism. The reason the *NME*, for instance, can't comprehend this sort of thing is that they don't have that cynicism. They still believe that rock'n'roll is supposed to be naive and wonderful, and if you give them irony they say, 'Oh dear, that's distasteful. Let's forget about it. Let's pretend it's not humorous.' That's a very primitive cynicism born out of a very vulgar and naive ideology."

Has pop music let you down?

"No. I know what it's capable of because when I grew up it was blatantly capable of it and it was delivering. Expectations have been lowered since and deliveries have been faltering. It's just a question of raising people's expectations again.

"We can do it. I'll make the records if you'll raise the expectations. It's a long war, but 'Corrosion' might win one battle and, after all, it's the only war worth fighting."

How much is revenge the motive?

"*Gift* was revenge, a weapon very specifically pointed. This is the gloating, much more widespread, more general."

Why did you go to live in Hamburg?

"It's the largest city in the Federal Republic, which is the most powerful country in Europe. It's just such a cool place, because it's not populated by cool people like Berlin. Love the people."

Do you feel badly done in by Britain, then, by the press…

"Yeah. Not so much these days, because I've got a reasonable amount of goodwill stored up, but one knows it's only goodwill as long as you don't start going on about aesthetics when they ask you what your favourite colour is."

Perhaps you were better off as goth's missing man, the '80s' own Jim Morrison. I can just hear the headlines – "Eldritch spotted gunrunning in South America". As soon as you come back, you're just part of…

"The circus? I don't think so, because this record is so far off what people expect, especially after *Gift*. And I mean apologies to Slough, but we ain't gonna be out there playing next week. Or the week after. Or the week after that. I'm not going to be turned into the sort of person where, after a while, there are only two sorts of people – there's the entourage, and they're good guys, and then there's the bastard public and they're just there to make the turnstiles go click. Or if they've got a pulse they get fucked, and if they haven't then they're the people you score the drugs off. It's really dehumanising."

What are your writing impulses now? Considering that you've cleaned up and look fit(ter) and happy, can we really expect the traumatised emotional blackmail of "Marian" or the vicious drug inertia of "Nine While Nine"?

"I'm only this fit because I'm about to be tortured all over again. I'm not gonna do it to myself by touring but this business takes an awful lot out of you. As for all the myths about me – well, the ones you know are perfectly true."

Of course. You feed off your myth.

"If someone's come up with a good idea, I don't think, 'Hmm, better go out and live that one', not like Wayne."

So the drug-taking, womanising rock'n'roll rebel isn't that important?

"No. I have a body of work built up that is so substantial that it will eventually get Dylanologised. I have total faith in the ability of history to judge, which is why the gloating of 'Corrosion' is so non-specific. I don't feel the need to say, 'Hey, I'm being vindicated now.'"

**ALL THE WHILE** we're talking, incidentally (or maybe not so incidentally), Eldritch has three pairs of shades arranged before him on the table – two wire-framed bike-cop models and a vaguely Ray-Ban number.

Has your lay-off changed your attitude at all?

"It's confirmed my unwillingness to pay attention to anybody else. I overhear things, but I make no effort to listen. We don't really figure to re-enter the arena; we figure to sit in the emperor's seat for a while, then go on holiday, then sit in the emperor's seat for a while, then go on holiday, then sit in the emperor's seat for a while… We're not interested in being Christians or lions really. Before, I was a Christian. Now I'm an emperor. A benevolent one. I mean, if I had my way, I'd stop the lions eating the Christians, but some people seem born to be Christians and some people seem born to be lions and there's not a lot you can do. Thanks to them, we've been pushed into the emperor's chair. It's quite comfy."

Have you, in your time away, seen anything encouraging?

"What, to do with music?"

To do with anything.

Twenty seconds' silence. Then, "No. But nothing discouraging either. It's all just perfectly logical and according to the scheme of things. Life went on and I expect it to go on. I'd find it pretty weird, in fact, if I had seen any light… or darkness."

Control seems important to you, while all around others are relinquishing theirs.

"Yeah. But you see, although I put my sole existence into making records, I don't need to make records. I mean, if I hadn't gone off and been a little degenerate in the meantime, I daresay I'd have joined the Diplomatic Corps – that's what I'm trained for. Or MI6."

So what'd you think of *Spycatcher*?

"That's pretty damn irrelevant – that's all to do with the Home Office, isn't it? I haven't read it, but I believed Harold when he said it the first time. I was pretty young then, but I figured, 'Sure, that's the way the world is.' I can't see what the surprise is all about. And then there was Nixon – what the hell did they expect? It's just politics."

So was Nixon hard done by or was he just dumb to get caught?

"I thought Nixon was a great president. He got the Americans out of Vietnam, he made friends – to some extent – with the Russians and he certainly made friends with the Chinese. He was the best president in terms of foreign policy that nation had in a long time, and I thought they were very stupid to get rid of him. He was very stupid to make a mess of covering up Watergate – I mean, Reagan survived Irangate."

Patricia: "I was over there when that happened and, you know, Reagan called up Richard Nixon and asked him how to survive it."

Eldritch is supposed to be a pretty ruthless character himself.

"Not really. I'm a counter-attacker by nature. I'm not a pre-emptive-strike man."

Most people in your position, if they're interested in maintaining control, tend to make a point of confounding (Robert Smith) or confirming (John Lydon) their public image. You tend to do neither.

"That's where the hardship comes in. It's a lot of extra work and a lot of extra worry and it's dreadful publicity. Anecdotes? I just don't have them."

Will "Corrosion" chart?

"I'm told it will. I don't care. It's a good record now, it'll be a good record in five years' time. I don't care when people buy it, though I think it's more accessible to people; it has a more accessible top layer than maybe records we've had out in the past. That's just a function of the way it's recorded, I don't think it's a function of the song."

So the song's a wolf in sheep's clothing. Or… uh… a wolf in… what? Brontosaurus' clothing? I dunno, I'll cheat and put in something really witty and apposite when I write this.

"Ha! I think it's a shark in wolf's clothing. That was a pretty duff metaphor to start with. Forget about that one…"

But it is devious.

"Not deceitfully so. It's just crafty. Whatever level you take it on, I hope it makes sense. I mean, I'd like people to go for everything they can get out of it and all at once – that's what symbolism and obscurism are all about – but I don't expect that.

"It's the only thing I get off on, though. It's the only thing that would make me wanna sing the same song two nights running on tour. It's gotta have that overwhelming panoply of effects."

What do you read now?

"*Der Spiegel* and *The* [London] *Times* – I've started doing the crossword again. Last month I read *Pilgrim's Progress* and *Beowulf*."

Films?

"I don't have a television in Hamburg. That's one of the reasons for not writing in Leeds, because I'd spend 24 hours – well, 25 hours a day by the

time I'd taken some medicine – watching TV. I was very pleased to be forced to catch the Rutger Hauer season while we were in the studio. Patricia was renting anything with Rutger Hauer in it. Some of them are real stinkers, but he's so funny in *The Hitcher* – it's a brilliant comic performance. You'll love it.

"It really makes you wanna go out and do it. There's not a lot of films in which the character is so obviously deranged but, at the same time, makes it look like such fun that even the sanest person could imagine doing it. I mean, to go out and wanna be *The Terminator* you've gotta be a moron basically – it's great to watch but you'd never do it yourself. This is different."

So what makes you happy, Eldritch?

"Cats still make me ludicrously happy."

What makes you sad?

"Nothing makes me sad, because I think there has to be some element of surprise in order to feel sad."

What else?

"Well, I'm thinking of learning to drive. The thing is, whenever I go abroad, I invariably end up driving and I don't have a licence or anything, which is probably not the thing to do. Then, you see, what happens after that is I buy a car. At the moment I just can't figure out how to enjoy that, because I don't particularly like cars for their own sake and I don't particularly like driving.

"I'm very bad at it. I get these urges. I see these things and I wonder, 'What if…?' That's why I don't really enjoy it – because I'm responsible enough not to do what I feel the urge to do. I don't get the urge to drive fast, I just get the urge to drive off the road, especially when there's nothing on either side of me.

"It's got nothing to do with suicide; it's just got to do with driving a car off the edge of a cliff."

How would you kill someone?

"It would depend whether it was someone I liked or someone I didn't like."

OK, someone you like.

"It depends whether I think they'd appreciate something spectacular or something just very sedate. I thought the self-destruct programme in *Soylent Green* was pretty good for the sedate. I think if it was someone I really, really liked and they'd appreciate the spectacular, it would involve an expanse of scenery and an extraordinarily fast car."

And those you don't like?

"I'd always want it to take longer. It's best to kill someone they really like, I think."

You suggest in what you just said that you like and dislike but not love and hate.

"I'm very wary of it. I have to be very careful because I think I'm probably a bit obsessive by nature. I had to *totally* stop drinking in order to maintain any business whatever. I don't gamble. I don't do smack."

And love?

"Absolutely not. I only ever really did it once and I don't think I'm likely to do it again."

Because you don't like losing your personality in someone else, or because you don't like inflicting it?

"Both. We were just dreadful for each other. It didn't stop it being brilliant, but it's marginally better that it doesn't happen any more. That's tough. It still hangs over to the extent that I couldn't do it again."

What would induce you to lose your self-control, to endanger yourself in passion?

"I've only ever done that when I wasn't quite… Well, on stage I've done things that afterwards I've thought, 'No! Eldritch, that was just beyond the pale.'"

> "I think there has to be some element of surprise to feel sad"

Because you could or because you were out of it?

"Because I could, because I was out of it and because I had to. If you're in front of a crowd, you're in a position of responsibility, and if they're all waiting for you to sort out one moron, then you have to do it."

Did you feel pissed off being put in that position?

"Yeah. I mean, the last time it happened, I spent half an hour trying to talk the crowd into sorting out their own problem and then, eventually, I just dived. It was really sad. I felt very ashamed on their behalf that they let me do it."

OK, that's it. Was it good for you?

"I never know. I always go away thinking, 'Well, I haven't said enough about post-war dramatic theory or fencing or Chinese philology', which are, y'know, the things I really care about. And then someone always comes up to me and says, 'Well? Did you tell them how great the record is?' and I go, 'Oh, actually that never occurred to me.'"

Mission accomplished, I think.

"Well, I don't feel the urge to express myself outside the songs. I'm useless at small talk and I'm really a pretty boring person."

It's only that you've never sat across a table from Wet Wet Wet that allows you to say such things.

"No really, I can never remember a joke and I don't feel the need. The only conversations I quite get off on these days are the ones I have with you where we discuss how crap conversation is. I'm not socially honed and I don't feel the need to be; I was pretty cruel when I was. It got to be beyond a joke. Once you convince yourself you're the all-time best at it, where d'you go from there?"

How enigmatic.

"I don't feel enigmatic. Enigmatic is being deliberately obscure and I'm not. I might be oblique, but that's only because, to me, obliqueness is a clearer way of expressing something in its entirety."

Could this be the Oxford University training – the art of leaving oneself least open to attack, or are we talking about truth here?

"Truth. I can do the other as well, but I'm too out of training to be able to do that, and when I got really good at it I began to despise myself for it. In the songs, that crops up again and again, the contempt of oneself when one finds oneself on the verge of getting involved with all that."

So you're talking about a search for communication or a loathing of not wanting to communicate?

"I really don't know, but aside from the bit about Roy Kinnear, I stand by everything I've ever said to you."

Even the stuff about Norman Wisdom?

"Yeah."

Gods will be gods.

*Steve Sutherland* ●

**"Of course I'm taking the piss – it's the only way to be serious about it": Eldritch on making "gloriously stupid" records**

Guns N' Roses: "spooning broken glass and custard into your ears"

MEDIAPUNCH INC / ALAMY

ALBUMS REVIEW 1987

## ALBUMS

### Guns N' Roses Appetite For Destruction GEFFEN

Of course they're dreadful. What's more surprising is that so many members of the press, who on most other days of the week could be trusted to understand things, seemed to be surprised that Guns N' Roses aren't fun. How, one wonders, could they ever have expected that five LA skinnies with tattoos and tight trousers would have offered any hope or even fear for rock? Guns N' Roses, perhaps more than any other limp cock rockers, do exactly, *exactly* what you expect.

The inside cover has a picture of an android selling toy robots next to a rape victim with her knickers round her knees. Above them a monster that might have come from one of Hieronymus Bosch's off days waggles its tongue in what I suppose is meant to be a gesture of lasciviousness.

This is Guns N' Roses' idea of depravity, the furthest they can take the sleaze towards outrage. Now obviously only someone who's been living in a small box for their entire lives would ever feel even the slightest twinge of horror at all the studied disgust. The rest of the population of the world will snicker. A lot.

The best thing about Guns N' Roses is that they have a guitarist called Slash and another called Izzy Stradlin. The worst thing is everything else, but most of all the music. "Welcome To The Jungle" is the first song and as good a demonstration as any of what the band like to do with their noise. Basically this consists of playing all the instruments very loud and very carefully along the kick-ass school of things, nodding towards sentimentality but never so much that people might think they're soft. It sounds like someone's spooning broken glass and custard into your ears. "Sweet Child O' Mine" and "Rocket Queen" fill other bits of the record up with pretty much more of the same, giving whole new depths to the concept of variety.

It's a gruelling business wading through their creations, trying to think of some world where what they do could be seen as having even the slightest point, looking for signs that beneath the skulls and the shades there's a suggestion they can do something to thrill. The world is probably their house and the thrill, splitting up. The rest, as they say, is crap.

When the great book of pop comes to be written, Guns N' Roses will have forgotten their library ticket.

*Paul Mathur, MM Jul 25*

### The Bhundu Boys Tsvimbodzemoto DISCAFRIQUE

They are, of course, an out-and-out pop group. It's important to remember that. The success of The Bhundu Boys – both with their exhilarating live shows and their refreshing *Shabini* LP – has been one of the more gratifying features of a grey, grey year. But in our insufferable chauvinism the prevailing attitude is to regard them as an exotic novelty, soothing the guilty consciences of woolly liberals.

The Bhundus deserve more than that. They are supposedly "exotic", but those patronising them should consider the reason they are obviously more interesting than their western counterparts is that their terms of reference are much wider. Contrary to popular belief, they don't parade before us draped in the flag of Zimbabwe, self-consciously promoting their own culture; they've freely absorbed and learned from all the influence around them and they use them intuitively. They compete under their own terms and by their own definition as a pop group per se and they're a damn good one.

Of course, the African elements are the overriding characteristics of the band, but it's what they don't do with those influences, rather than what they do, that makes them special. They are sparing and understated almost to the point of being a tease, painlessly settling into a rhythmic groove that is disarming in its unerring accuracy. And yes, they are a dance band – it's your part and you can sweat if you want to – but it's not as crucial to their appeal as you might first assume. In everything they touch there is a rare vitality and warmth, personified by the smile on Biggie Tembo's face.

The title means "Stick Of Fire" and in Zimbabwe they are as famous for their political comment as they are for their persuasiveness on a dancefloor, and subjects covered during the course of the record include a discourse on the struggle for independence in Zimbabwe, the foolishness of greed and the importance of the family.

One of the tracks is called "Vakaparei" and I've been singing it all morning. Join the Bhundu celebration or have a grey day. *Colin Irwin, MM Jul 4*

### Marianne Faithfull Strange Weather ISLAND

There are a few people who have flickered through pop's endless night with the grace, dignity and beauty of Marianne Faithfull. Strangely, apart from her early dalliance with Jagger and the rest of the '60s sirens, her best work has come in the '80s. *Broken English* was the best attempt by a female British singer to articulate the fragility of obsession and the true precursor for what was to be bastardised into Suzanne Vega's witless simpering.

*Strange Weather* finds Faithfull managing to make something new out of what could have been the most hackneyed of ventures, an album of cover versions of old songs. The emphasis is on jazz and blues semi-standards, each teased out through her distinctive jewellery-gravelled voice, taking things outside rock and closer to Lotte Lenya or Marlene Dietrich than Nico or the aforementioned Vega.

"Boulevard Of Broken Dreams" sets the tone of deep regret that never tumbles into maudlin self-pity. It's necessarily melodramatic, possessing an almost filmic sense that

The Sugarcubes: "whisks of wanton campanology"

SINGLES REVIEW 1987

contemporary writers have ditched in favour of aural car chases. The following "Ain' Goin Down The Well No Mo" is one of the record's most curious moments, an a capella ramble through Leadbelly's original that never really considers authenticity and actually gains from its studied distance. She seems far happier with the likes of "Yesterdays" or "Love, Life And Money" where, despite the drenching sadness, she manages to communicate an ironic strength that misery rarely brings.

Tom Waits wrote a song specially for the record and it provides the title track, cleverly fitting in with the style of the rest of the things, a drunken regret slipping inevitably into oblivion as "*the fog comes rolling in*". It's not exactly an LP full of gags, but despite all that sadness it's hardly the stuff suicides are made of.

The other song written just for the album is "Hello Stranger", in which the nakedness of self-contempt becomes almost frightening. Whether the sadness has seeped through to Marianne herself is debatable, but with the real-life ravages she has experience over the last 15 years, there must be more than a grain of confession in the stylised regret.

Her reworking of "As Tears Go By" seems rather unnecessary, but even in its flurried sheen there's a few suggestions of how ravishing the original was. You can only listen to this version a dozen times on the run before tiring of the little cracks and sadness. "A Stranger On Earth" takes the disaffection even further, making you wonder whether she will ever re-enter the pop fold or whether she'd even want to. "*Someday when I prove my worth/I won't be a stranger on earth*". The stranger's coming home. *Paul Mathur, MM Aug 1*

## SINGLES

### The Sugarcubes Birthday ONE LITTLE INDIAN

Adorable, deplorable, oh superglue a leech to my navel if this is not the wild dark horse that came streaming past the pack to give Icelandic surrealist pop its first single of the week since Jaz Coleman's Eurovision winner "Boom Bang-A-Whoopsy! (I'm On Fire)".

The Sugarcubes are a phoenix from the defunct Kukl, but waste no wit on socialism or tourist attractions. With a dangerously cross-eyed chanteuse who resembles both Denis Lavant and the little girl who cuts your lips off in your nightmares, they head straight and bittersweet for the important things in life – "*She's got one friend, he lives next door... They listen to the weather, he knows how many freckles she's got... She's painting huge books... They saw a big raven... She touched it... Today is her birthday, they're sucking cigars... He got a chain of flowers, and sows a bird in her knickers... They lie in the bathtub...*"

Quite the most astonishing apposite brood of sound (sort of) accompanies these tortured sobs. Balloons of double bass and whisks of wanton campanology sway her into increasingly suspect Gaudi playgrounds. The most sinistral swirl of sinuosities.

For some absurd reason, I observed myself saying in a pub the other day, "Yeah, but I know a good record when I hear one." Then I thought, "Christ, you say some preposterous things sometimes." Playing this for the 47th time, I'm not so sure...

It breathes, melts, billows, changes shape. Die in the sea with the one you love. *MM Aug 22*

### The Primitives Thru The Flowers LAZY

So is "Thru The Flowers" actually any good? And the answer is: of course it is, you berk, even if it is more tame and tuneful than their others! But buy it anyway for the ravenous B-sides of "Everything Shining Bright" and "Across My Shoulder" and because, if you don't, everyone in the class will laugh at you and by hell you don't want to spend the rest of your adolescence over-reacting against popular opinion, do you now?

The daughter of "Blind Among The Flowers" by The Tourists, led astray by Edith Piaf's dealer, locked in an "Eat To The Beat" video (possibly "Shayla"), and kept on a diet of pink grapes and cinnamon. Artifice of sass. Feline, sirloin, parallel loins, that'll do nicely. *MM Aug 22*

### New Order True Faith FACTORY

New Order have always flickered along a fine line between the exquisitely resolute and the tinny. "True Faith", I'm afraid, is all trite finger-bobs, ballooning brass inanities and sadly reminiscent of Johnny Logan winning the Eurovision Song Contest in the space age. This is a remix, by the way, if you're still interested. *MM Aug 8*

### Prince U Got The Look WEA

Bouncing brilliantly off the breathless, plastic lust of Sheena Easton, Prince continues to explore and extend the textures of sex. "U Got The Look" is a self-adoring tussle among wet sheets, a singular musical simulation of the gush, the dreams, the penetrable. Submissive, velvety, the fruit to sink teeth into. Why he lifts his head halfway through with an inane grin and a silly baseball commentary I have, deliciously, no idea. But who's got the look? The girl? Certainly not. It's Prince! *MM Aug 8*

### Roland S Howard & Nikki Sudden Girl Without A Name CREATION

Arched, excruciatingly slow and measured tread, more bleary than bleary, through a ghost town of collapsed morals and purpose. Bleached reflections and wheeling, screeching guitar shapes, a history of rocks and bones. Deserts. *MM Aug 8*

ILPO MUSTO / REX / SHUTTERSTOCK

# 1987

OCTOBER – DECEMBER

## HAPPY MONDAYS, THE FALL, PUBLIC ENEMY, THE POGUES AND MORE

# "Not likely to be a disappointment"

**MM OCT 24 Former Smiths frontman Morrissey is feeling confident in the studio.**

**MORRISSEY IS ON** the way back! The former Smiths frontman has been working with Stephen Street and Durutti Column's Vini Reilly at Tears For Fears' studio in Bath, and 18 tracks are now reported to be complete. They are described as "sounding very lush and not likely to be a disappointment to Smiths fans".

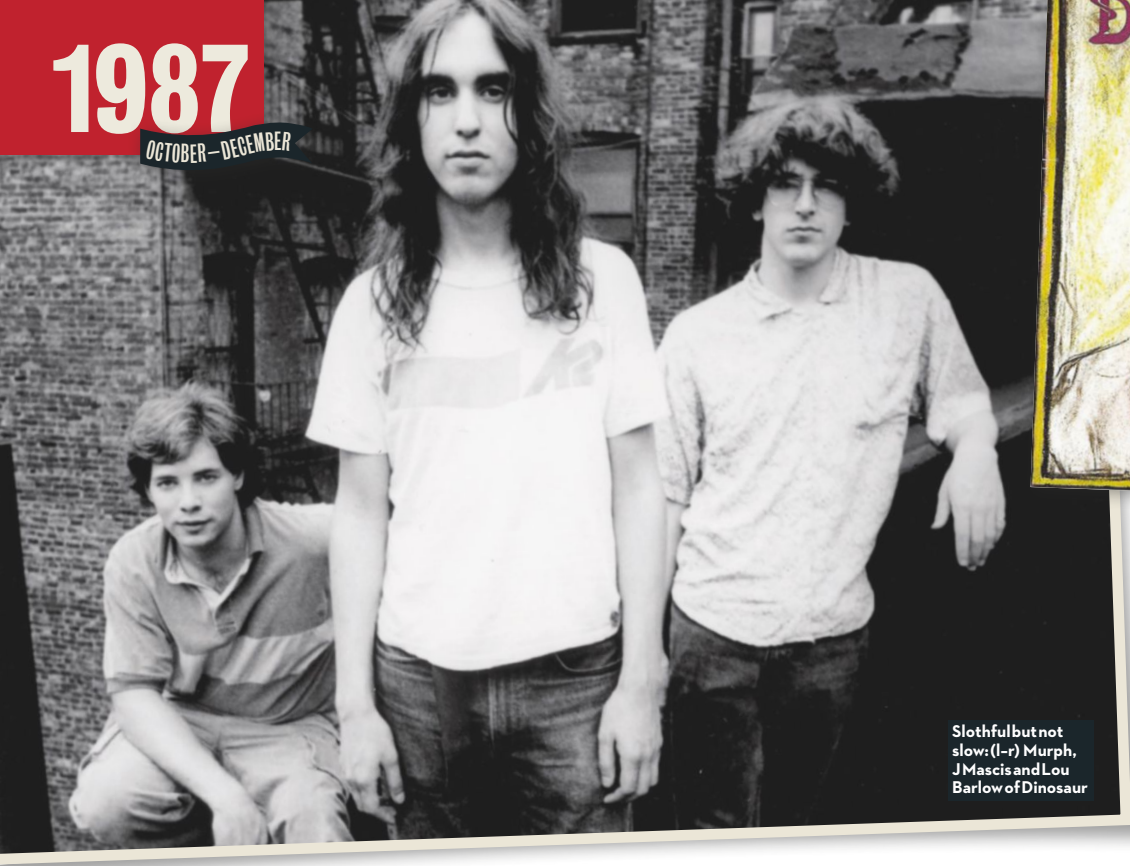
In the meantime, guitarist Johnny Marr has been taking time off from his rehearsals with The Pretenders for their American tour. He has been making a number of unannounced guest appearances with various bands in London and Manchester.

The remaining members of the old Smiths lineup, Andy Rourke and Mike Joyce, were due to appear at the London ICA on October 20 as part of Brix Smith's Adult Net, making their debut appearance.

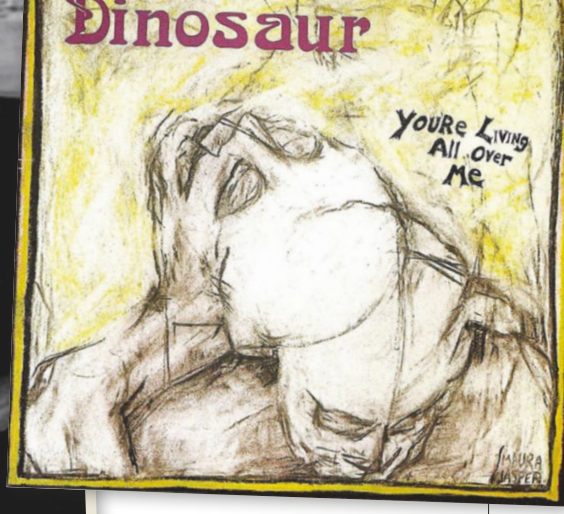
LONELY NO MORE

ITV / REX / SHUTTERSTOCK

Morrissey in a still from a *South Bank Show* episode about The Smiths. Filmed shortly before the band broke up, it will be aired on October 18, 1987



Slothful but not slow: (l–r) Murph, J Mascis and Lou Barlow of Dinosaur




# "A pretty lazy bunch"

**MM OCT 24** Introducing a monosyllabic new group from the USA, Dinosaur.

**AS IF 1987** had not already yielded a mountainous backlog of crucial rock listening, SST have descended upon England, via the good offices of Roland Hyams, with a cargo of assorted sub-art, post-thrash, bleary and blaring American releases hitherto unavailable over here. It's a probable mixture of rough diamonds and pebbles which, to investigate fully, would require a year's sabbatical. Names range from Black Flag to the Meat Puppets via Angst, Blind Idiot God and Das Damen.

To save time, I can but heed hearsay and state for your information that the Black Flag stuff is awful, the Meat Puppets are as fine as ever and Angst, Blind Idiot God and Das Damen are, at a blind touch, worth a gamble. As for Dinosaur, however, I can state urgently and unequivocally that their *You're Living All Over Me* is one of this year's finest, roughest tumbles.

Dinosaur, at some instinctual level, understand the value of inertia, of apathy, the creed that dares, but can't be bothered, to speak its name. They regress, correctly, into a supine aphasia. Theirs is a music of sublime prostration, junk in heaven, voices that palpably emanate from indoors, voices that have not got up yet. Musically, imagine early Pere Ubu with their terror, their nerve edges blunted, their extremities subdued. It's not that they are dull, but they are foggy, in bromide, enveloping lurches. They are bleary, half-alive and not all there in a time when emotional pitches, well-roundedness are pop's ghastly imperatives, with sloth and time-wasting having been banished by some invisible time-and-motion study of aesthetics.

Dinosaur are slothful but not slow. They find a beauty in the horizontal. Their "Little Fury Things" (backing vocals courtesy of Lee Ranaldo) boasts a citrus, harmonic twist that would be the envy of The Byrds or REM, though where the latter are wide-eyed, wistful and visionary, Dinosaur deliver their cream with all the languor of a yawn.

Dinosaur use wah-wah guitar and seem to exist, like a great deal of American indie rock, at an interface between thrash and hippiedom. So, J Mascis, vocalist, guitarist and largely songwriter, why the "Dinosaur" moniker?

> **"We all came from hardcore bands. We were into Oi!, like The 4-Skins"**

"...It's thinking of all those West Coast people... Jefferson Airplane, people that have been around for years..."

People you have any respect for? "...No!"

But there are '60s antecedents in the weathered, careless, ancient blur of Dinosaur. I'm thinking of Neil Young. Do you listen to Neil Young? Who do you listen to?

"Uh... everybody."

Now, this may not seem much of an answer. This is not Quote Of The Year and wants for the delicious, aphoristic quality which we so enjoy in an Oscar Wilde or a Nietzsche. But stark print cannot do justice to its catatonic deadweight, more eloquent than any Pete Burns rant, the sprawl of the drawl, the great mental cloud that attempts to conceive of the great swathes of rock history in which Dinosaur are soaked. The pause that precedes this answer is like the death of the word. It encapsulates the (dis)spirit of Dinosaur, their non-commitment, the anti-urge that prompted them to fail to meet up with Simon Reynolds for a recent interview.

Simon, whose aesthetic is in part based around the failure to meet appointments, around a celebration of inefficiency and delinquency, was undoubtedly gladdened by this show of apathy as he stood on the street corner in New York for 45 minutes in vain.

Another story goes that Dinosaur were once so unable to be bothered to turn up at a concert they were due to play that they sent along another band instead to take their place as Dinosaur for a night. Is this true, J?

"Yeah, well, they only told us about it the day before..."

What do you do with yourselves? From whence do you derive the will to live?

"...We sit around all day and watch TV..."

Do you drink? "...No..." Do drugs? "...No..." Are you miserable? "No!"

The title, *You're Living All Over Me* is a reference to domestic claustrophobia. Dinosaur, however, do not so much burst out into fresh spaces as retreat further into the house, into the bedroom. "Paledo", their last track, is made up of cut-up tapes from TV so densely enmeshed between a forlorn, acoustic ramble that it's like the release of stuffy air into the atmosphere, the stench of a TV OD. "Our bass player has been making up these collages since he was 14. He figured he'd like to use the best of them on the album."

I've yet to address the thrash, the abstract abrasion of Dinosaur.

"We all came from hardcore bands originally, and we were all into Oi!, people like The 4-Skins. I guess all that English stuff was pretty stupid, but I still have the T-shirts."

Dinosaur's thrash and white noise are poorly fused, thankfully; more of an intervention, like lightning through heavy clouds, or an adjacent occurrence, a destabilising, schizophrenic shift, as if they are dunking their heads in and out of an electric storm.

Dinosaur know that the energy is not their own: "I guess you could describe us as a pretty lazy bunch!"

But without resorting to hard work, discipline or exercise, they become open to charges, let more flood through. It's not them – it's just everywhere, in the air, the cathode rays, the fretboards, the flying junk. *David Stubbs*

# A de-sampled album planned

**NME NOV 7** The new JAMs album will contain silences.

**THE JUSTIFIED ANCIENTS** Of Mu Mu release a castrated version of their controversial album *1987: What The Fuck Is Going On?* this week. The de-sampled album is entitled *1987: The Edits*. The record now includes large amounts of silence where copyright-infringing material used to be. The band were forced to take such action after being threatened with prosecution by ABBA, who took exception to The JAMs' sampling of their mega hit "Dancing Queen".

"No, we don't think we're ripping the public off with this record," said Rockman of The JAMs. "The gaps in the record just show up the idiocy of the copyright laws as far as we're concerned."

On the sleevenotes of the new album are instructions for restoring the edited version of *1987...* to its full illegal glory, including a list of the records The JAMs sampled. The band are currently busy recording a single with the London Community Gospel Choir, which is being rush released in three weeks' time.

"We've heard these rumours: Pop Will Eat Itself

# "Not fit for daytime"

**NME OCT 17** John Peel acts on "sexist" PWEI single.

**JOHN PEEL, PROTECTOR** of the nation's morals? That's the whisper doing the rounds at Broadcasting House, where it is believed Peelie lobbied producers to prevent Pop Will Eat Itself's "Beaver Patrol" from reaching the Radio 1 "A" playlist.

A regular visitor to the station tells the *NME* that the single was favoured by a number of producers who decide on what's to be played, but Peel approached them individually asking them not to playlist the "sexist" single. Richard Poppie said: "We've heard these rumours, but it's not really up to us to comment on them. We can't say they're true or false. It just happens, I suppose."

Attempts to contact Peel were fruitless, but a spokesman for Radio 1 said: "We didn't like the single. It was given fair consideration, but we didn't think it was fit for daytime playlisting. DJs' remarks are taken into account, and if John Peel didn't feel the record was right to be played, we would have taken note of his comments."

However, the record was played frequently on Janice Long's evening show.

## THE MATERIAL WORLD OF DAVID GAHAN

**NME OCT 10**

The Depeche Mode singer's objects of desire (and derision).

### Music (past)
Stones
Doors
Velvet Underground
Iggy And The Stooges
Bowie
Roxy
Lou Reed
Howling Wolf
John Lee Hooker
Kraftwerk
Damned
Buzzcocks
Undertones
Banshees
Motörhead

### Music (present)
The Bunnymen
New Order
Jesus And Mary Chain
The The
Talk Talk
Kate Bush
Cameo
Prince
Smiths
PiL
Pet Shop Boys

### Reading
General biographies
*The Stones* by Philip Norman
*No One Gets Out Of Here Alive* by Jerry Hopkins and Danny Sugerman
*James Dean* by David Dalton
*NME*

### Television
*Brookside*
*Bread*
*Network 7*
I hate all quiz shows, anything to do with Paul Daniels and TV in general. But I watch most of the junk that everyone else pretends they don't watch.

### Films
*Cruising*
*Taxi Driver*
*Apocalypse Now*
*Deer Hunter*
*Midnight Express*
*The Killing Fields*
*Blade Runner*
*Spinal Tap*

*The Comic Strip*
*Carry On*
I hate sci-fi (with the exception of *Blade Runner*)

### Drink
Lager
Brandy
Water
Tea

### Clothes
Leather
Black boots
Levi's
White T-shirts
Gaultier

### Cars
Aston Martin
Porsche
Mercedes

### Places
Paris
Berlin
California
Italy

### Food
Italian
French
Indonesian
Any junk

### Hates
Most DJs (and the people who control them).
Datsun and Toyota cars.
Journalists who review records and don't even play them.
The bastard that kicked my dog in the guts.
People who say, "Is it him? It isn't, it is!" and they're standing next to you in the supermarket.
Garlic breath.
Ignorance in general.

### Flat
Five-bed house in Essex/Studio flat in London on the river

ULLSTEIN BILD / GETTY; DAVE WAINWRIGHT / REX / SHUTTERSTOCK; STEPHEN PARKER / ALAMY

# "Crank the volume, distortion, scream – that's rock"

**MM OCT 10 Introducing an exciting, oddball new band from Boston... the Pixies.**

The Pixies in 1987: (l–r) David Lovering, Mrs John Murphy (aka Kim Deal), Black Francis and Joey Santiago

**IN A BAR** above Boston's grainy Rat Club, there's a war going on. On the TV. On the ceiling. I don't know which war it is. At least I know that's the ceiling. How can I make sure it is? I know. I'll ask a Pixie. Here's one. What's he saying? "You have music, but you have, like, your own life. You have the big questions, but you still say to your buddies: 'Have you heard that?' It's like baseball cards."

Sure, but is that the ceiling? "Rock music is an entertainment, but it's noise. And all these extremes of volume. The human body was not designed to hear these things, not even with advanced science. Even in Chuck Berry's day it had this negative effect on the body. It's just so loud. Can you imagine someone from about 200 years ago hearing that kind of noise? It's like thunder. They'd think it was like God speaking to them or something. It's like lightning. What else is it like? What else is there? Can you think of anything else?"

Uuh... rushes of blood to the heads of dromedaries. Can I get you a drink?

**I TOLD YOU THERE** were pixies. Here, there, every-flaming where. All you have to do is find something no one else is thinking about and think about it hard.

It gets easier with practice. More to the point, there is a loud and anxious, sometimes sweetly cacophonic, rock group called the Pixies. Now. A "rock group" as in Iggy thru Gun Club (although they also like Hüsker Dü, Tom Waits, George Formby, "Bela Lugosi's Dead" by Bauhaus and an SST band called Angst), as in harsh and hysterical and heavenly and harrowing rather than "emoting" (where the streets have no real people, just hired extras) and motionless.

These Pixies know when to scream and when to giggle. They formed *somewhere* (guitarist Joey and frontman Black were college roommates), they've been going for a little while. They answer "Yeah, sure" if you ask if they're hip sexy Zulus, and they are three boys and one girl. I don't meet Mrs John Murphy, the bassist, because she had a family tragedy the day before. I just meet the three – Charles "Black" Francis (pure voice, guitar, raconteur), Joey Santiago (feedback, handsome) and David Lovering (drums, gleaming grin to match his shirt) – who are a family tragedy. Or comedy. Whatever. They have a small eight-song album out in October called *Come On Pilgrim*, which will incongruously enough (some might say) be on 4AD.

Black Charles is a chubby salt-of-the-earth avuncular poet who talks nine to the dozen and warms to you when you get fed up with asking questions and just answer back. Joey is a Filipino who has trouble reading, but is so lean and pretty it couldn't even matter. David looks anything but decadent, which judging by my observational prowess means he's probably the Marquis De Sade. The Pixies sing about incest a lot, but first here's what Joey thinks about holidays.

"I hate fucking holidays. Everyone gets neurotic. You get drunk and make flames. Like, New Year's Eve is just a day to me."

When Joey was at high school he named his second computer program Iggy. He named his second computer program Pop. His teacher said: "Why don't you name them after trees like everybody else?" Joey thinks if he gets famous in America playing noisy guitars he'll be able to go home (he left when he was seven) and have big fun with lots of lovely Filipino girls. You could describe Joey as "healthy". When the Pixies come over to support Throwing Muses on their British tour around February, me and Joey are going to open a bar called Cold Beer On Sale Inside. I doubt very much that this was just a drunken fancy.

David claims to be contradictory but isn't, is into Rush, A Certain Ratio, mysticism, and magnetised contraptions, wants the Pixies to be on *The Young Ones* (God, how passé), mentions Rutger Hauer, and is some sort of electronics wizard. I don't understand the mechanics of this, but it seems he's invented some illegal pirate dish which can pick up private conversations from miles away. It can also track the mating sounds of wild bobcats, and he assures me these sound very much like a baby being axed. Another thing he can do is wire gaming machines so they start without being touched, so "folks get freaked". Alternatively, he can blow them up. When I put forward the suggestion that he could work out a way of making large money from his sabotage, he looks confused and says it's more fun to just blow them up. "Right," I say. "Right."

Joey once biked across the state of Massachusetts to raise money for charity, but when he got back he was too lazy to collect the funds. "So many damn customers. Sponsors. What you call them." He pretended he never got back. If anyone asks, he's still pedalling across a beach somewhere, OK?

I think it's time we asked Black why he sings about incest so much. "It's all those characters in the Old Testament. I'm obsessed with them.

Why it comes out so much I don't know. Look, I don't have any sisters, OK? All brothers. And we're all very hetero. I use the word 'motherfucker' in the way it was used 200 years ago; it's been devalued since. I love insults and put-downs. Especially Spanish ones; I'm particularly impressed with those. When you ask Puerto Ricans what they mean, you always get a long explanation with detailed information. English put-downs don't reflect culture or class. No style."

Joey speaks Tagalog. It's his native tongue. His one memory of his birthplace is that when The Beatles broke up his local church rang out with people singing "Ob-La-Di, Ob-La-Da" all day long. La la la la, life goes on.

Charles is terrified of being compared to Lou Reed and this is why he always sings in a very high voice. He knows rock'n'roll is supposed to be groinal. "That's why everyone who listens to it can at least *remember* puberty. I hate to sound anti-old, but people don't have sex after 50, also by the time you're 50 you accept that all this singing about frustration is just bullshit. The oldest rock stars are about 48 now, so it's gonna be interesting..."

"A new market could open up," says David. "We're all laying back in our nursing home kinda stuff..."

Sorry, what did you say rock was? The readers might want to know. "Oh, suck, crank the volume, distortion, scream – that's rock."

Thanks. What's all this about diseases?

*"I said I wanna be a singer like Lou Reed/I like Lou Reed, she said, sticking her tongue in my ear/Let's go, let's sit, let's talk, politics goes so good with beer/And while we're at it, baby, why don't you tell me one of your biggest fears?/I said losing my penis to a whore with disease – just kidding/... I'm a humble guy..." ("I've Been Tired")*

**"NO ONE SAYS** the word 'penis', do they? It's a real 'medical' word. Everyone goes sick and blushes. Oh shit, I just think love is everything and everything is perfect, so love is perfect. I just like words that sound good."

David interrupts to say that if you play Pixies' record backwards, it goes: "*Natas, Natas...*"

"I mean, I just like nice-sounding words like 'caribou'," continues Black. "OK, that's a nice animal too. But I just keep saying 'repent' as a joke. Reincarnation and stuff? I don't know what that's about. You just do images from deep within your soul. So, they're interesting. Much more than trying to figure it all out. Like T Rex. Like *Eraserhead*. These are my favourite things. Not Nancy Sinatra. Surprises. We're surrealists. Maybe the avant-garde appeals to people from our economic background, because we're typically rejecting the older meaningful Christian values, but we're still confused as hell.

"Like with all the satellites and shit there's so many words flying through the air you don't know what's going on, you don't know what to think. I really love all that stuff, though – shit – they talk about Aids in Africa, everyone's gonna die in 10 years – you just think: 'What the fuck's going on?' And then – and then you don't even think that any more..."

Black? Charles? "Yeah?" Let me get you another drink. Let me get you a house.

The Pixies' first full-length album will spout and surface next spring if your ears haven't gone on the wagon after *Come On Pilgrim*. Charming name, that.

"It's stolen from a Californian Christian folk singer called Larry Norman, who always says: 'Come on pilgrim, you know he loves you.' That's such a cool line. I phoned his girlfriend to see if it was cool to steal it and he never phoned back, so fuck it. If I get sued, I'll say I stole it from John Wayne. Say, does America seem like a bizarre wasteland to you? The world and his wife and their mediocrity?"

Tell me about "Ed Is Dead", Black. "There was this hideous weird girl at my high school who wore a burlap sack, cords and rubber shoes. I'd talk to her, but no one else would. I didn't know what was wrong with her, then later I found out she'd been mentally affected after a car accident.

"Five years later I went back and saw her riding a bike around, exactly the same as she ever was. Except... she was really sunburned." And her name was Ed? "Shit, no. It just rhymes."

**"I just keep saying 'repent' as a joke... You just do images from deep within your soul"**

*"Elevator lady, elevator lady, elevator lady, lady lady lady, levitate me!" ("Levitate Me")*

**"IMAGINE AFTER THE** nuclear holocaust," says Joey Santiago, "there's just this heap of rocks. And one guy will come along and bang two together and he'll be the first star! Wow! Hey, I got a friend who brings me crystals from Stockholm. They're really wild. Also, she brings me pomegranates."

Black went on an archaeological dig not long ago. He found jewels stuck in the ribs of babies, and pearls in their teeth. "And there was this one pearl that had, over the years, made it all the way from the bottom of the Pacific Ocean to the middle of the Arizona desert. By itself."

Ladies and gentlemen, do I have no choice but to give you the Pixies or what? Get off of your toadstool for the loudest new prayers in The West. Slipshod and imminent. There is no ceiling. *Chris Roberts*

March 21, 1987: Prince at the First Avenue nightclub in Minneapolis

# The artist is not credited

**NME NOV 28** Second Prince album of '87 is strictly on the down-low.

**PRINCE WILL HAVE** a new album in the shops in the first week of December, his second release of the year. The eight-track LP comes in a completely black sleeve, except for the catalogue number which appears in small peach print. The artist is not credited and the album has no title to speak of, but insiders say it is likely to become known as *The Black Album*.

There is no official word from WEA, who distribute Paisley Park, although they did say there were strong rumours of a release before the end of the year.

But, with the help of The Revolution, an unofficial Prince information service in the UK, *NME* has learned that the album will be sneaked out on December 7 with the minimum of fuss and no advertising. The tracks were all recorded in the last 18 months, some from the *Sign O' The Times* sessions and earlier material.

The full track listing is "Le Grind", "Cindy C", "Dead On It", "When 2 R In Love", "Bob George", "Superfunkycalifragisexi", "2 Nigs United 4 West Compton" and "Hard Rock In A Funky Place".

Plans are also afoot for a live album next year to coincide with the release of the *Sign O' The Times* concert movie.

JIM STEINFELDT / GETTY

# "Bits of words stuck together"

**Introducing the HAPPY MONDAYS. After a gripping couple of singles, we join Shaun Ryder, Bez and the rest to hear outlandish tales of crack cocaine and policemen who read the *NME*. "I don't shout when I'm not shouting," says Shaun, "but I always end up shouting."**

— NME NOVEMBER 14 —

"YOU'RE A RIGHT bunch of plastic-faced bastards, you lot are. Twenty-four-hour party folk, can't smile, just plastic-faced bastards."

Happy Mondays' mate Minnie crashed into the room, spat a load of drug-induced hate in their faces and his words ended up as the title of their debut album. Now he's asking for royalties.

When the album *Squirrel And G-Man Twenty Four Hour Party People Plastic Face Carnt Smile (White Out)* was released on Factory in April, it had no title track, but now, with the release of the recently written "Twenty Four Hour Party People", it has.

The single pinches like no other 45 will this year. The video is as strong and stunning as The Smiths' three "Queen Is Dead" promo films, which it's makers, The Bailey Brothers of Newcastle, assisted Derek Jarman on.

In amidst the careerists, the famous by association, the whiners, the bleaters, the dull, the day-glo dull, the psychedelic dull, the disco brothers, the chart heavyweights, the samplers, the rappers, the theme tunes, the flys, the waiters, the people who grinned themselves to death, the SAWs, the JAMMs, the AOCs, the DMCs, the GBOAs, the poets, the know its, the rusty egos and the Antony Price suits, Happy Mondays are the sanest band in the world. They pull my mind out from beneath the ocean and nail it to a plank of wood. »

STEHPEN PARKER / ALAMY

July 20, 1987: Shaun Ryder and Bez dancing outside Dingwalls in Camden, London, after a Happy Mondays gig

Things are going to be OK, baby, you can calm down now.

Earlier tonight, before the gig, Shaun Ryder, the singer, scraped last week's shaving scab off with the same blunt razor he cut himself with in the first place. Blood is edging out slowly from the sore. The sides of his face are almost smooth, but his chin is covered in inch-long corn-coloured whiskers.

Crouching on top of a steel-rimmed desk chair, he's recognising us in slow motion. His brain hits it in a millisecond, but his body is suffering stage-lag. His eyelids open to speak, and between them they fold into a welcoming smile.

His long-crooked nose with its large nostrils bends dramatically to the right and the insides of his ears turn orange. He drags his words through his impish grin like he's struggling with a psychiatric disorder.

"Hey Dave. That review, pretty good that," he tells his press officer.

"Yes, James did that."

"Oh, you're him, you did that review? I thought you were black."

Ha ha ha ha. The ice is shattered and I step inside Happy Mondays.

> "We were good but shit. Something had to come out of it"

**WE MEET IN** The Ellesmere pub, Walkden, North Manchester. Bez, percussion, the man with the wildest eyes and strongest facial structure this side of Easter Island, pulls a Laura Ashley-covered sofa across the pub floor so our alcove is impenetrable.

Bez is the lynchpin of the band's live performance. Far more than just an onstage dancer with percussion, he is a Powerball, an attraction point; he eases the pressure on the others, and channels the musical and physical tension off the stage and into the audience.

And there is a tension, buckets of it; it's a sense of intimidation and character that forms when the band comes together on stage.

"It's not that we're intimidating," says Bez. "It's just that we're normal, and that scares people."

"It just shows that we're mates," Shaun continues. "Like I could kick Paul's keyboard over and start fighting with him, but you could tell we were mates. You can't do that with someone you don't know. Well you can but you have to finish it, and even if you know that person quite well it's going to affect the mood of the band for a while. Because we're close it could happen and we'd just let it pass."

Have you ever fought on stage?

"Yeah, fucking hell, of course. Mainly with just each other. It could have been something that's been going on in the dressing room or something could just snap."

Something could just snap. Happy Mondays, Shaun Ryder, Bez, Paul Ryder on bass, Paul Davies on keyboards, Mark Shaw on guitar, and Gary Whelan on drums, are the only independent band in Britain. They play gigs, and release records, and wish Factory would advertise their releases, but as far as the intense careerism that all the other plastic shit-eaters we promote stink of, it doesn't exist here.

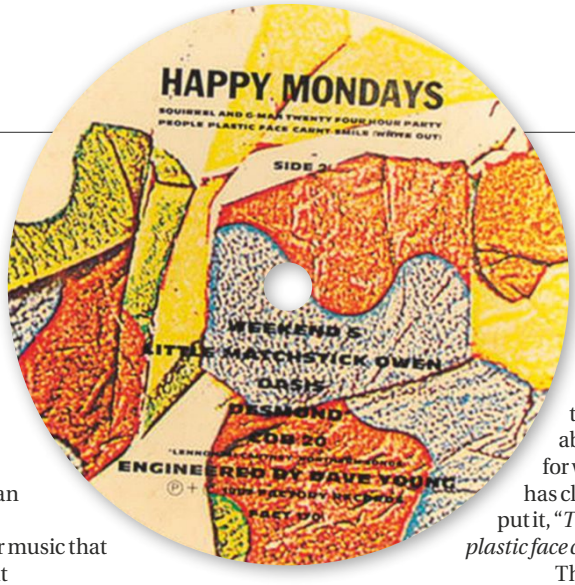
Any chance of traditional careers or futures have been demolished by unemployment or ignored for its lack of excitement, so the unrealistic idea of becoming pop stars, which is still the carrot for most young bands, is just part of another world. Happy Mondays don't constantly "think band", they haven't been infected with desperation, and they haven't had the comfort to remain naive.

They have the band, and the unity of the band is security. They all have their own things they get off on, but with Happy Mondays they have identity.

"Urgh, we would have to sit near a pig," laughs Shaun pointing to the 6ft 5in-tall bloke with his black crop, moustache and sideburns, and his very plain clothes, eating his pub grub with wife (WPC Pork?) and mother (Inspector Grunter?). Before I have the chance to ask whether they are using David Bellamy's definition or Charles Manson's, Shaun blurts: "The pigs read the *NME* round here, man, I'm not lying. I know they do, man. Because he (*pointing to his brother, Paul, the band's*

Happy Mondays in London, 1987: (l–r) Shaun Ryder, Gary Whelan, Paul Ryder, Mark "Bez" Berry, Paul Davis and Mark Day

STEPHEN PARKER / ALAMY




*bass player*) fucking gives it them to read. And there's us lot in it going, 'Oh yeah, speed, dope.' And this pig's reading it."

"That's why I moved out of my last house," says Paul, "the squad moved in downstairs."

Happy Mondays started out with that same light-fingered Manchester guitar sound that James, The Railway Children, and The Bodines have used, but by learning to interpret, not imitate, their influences they've built a far more versatile and challenging style than any of their Mancunian contemporaries can come up with.

They've been wiring so many hooks to their music that by the time their last single "Tart Tart" caught me fast in March it was sharp enough to nearly rip my stomach out.

The groups they mention when asked come thick and fast: The Beatles, Stones, funk, electro, Mamas & Papas, Frank Zappa, Vicious Rumour Club. But unlike other bands who namedrop as a way of getting on and off bandwagons, the Happy Mondays don't sound like any of the music they quote as personal taste. Shaun had never heard an ACR or Fall LP until 18 months ago, Paul Davies didn't know who Mark E Smith was until he saw *Hey! Luciani* at Christmas and Gaz's hero is Ringo Starr.

If you scraped away the surface layers, beyond the one or two mediocre and old songs on the LP, then you'll know what competent songwriters Happy Mondays are. If you don't, then the powerful spanking sounds that break out of "Twenty Four Hour Party People" – Gaz's crisp drum intro, Paul's keyboards that blast like a horn section – will re-educate you.

The band's songs don't scuttle, or shuttle, or throttle, or thrust, they aren't castrated by an embarrassment of rock or fear of funk; they take their time, they show off their construction, they are splendid in their brilliance. I ask them how they ended up sounding like they do and Shaun tells me, "It's probably because when we started we were all shit, good but shit. Something had to come out of it."

The band, probably unwittingly, have taken the tensions and disciplines from different styles of music, not the tunes. But their music, be it delicate ("Olive Oil" on the LP), or tough ("Tart Tart"), or a mixture of the two ("24 Hour Party People") is only a bedding for Shaun Ryder to lay his world-weary battered lyrics over.

"Most of the songs are just bits of words stuck together," he tells me over his final Saturday-lunchtime pint. "It's lucky that they mean something at the end. They're just phrases, or three-liners that people come up with. Then another three-liner will come into my head and I'll start throwing it all around together. If it starts to sound right, that's when I'll write it down."

Shaun's drawling vocals nag against the flow of the music, they etch themselves into it. The pain he expresses through his pronunciation, the way he slurs one minute and is rounding his O's and spitting his T's the next, is reminiscent of the emotion and contempt the young Bob Dylan used to pour into his songs.

But it's probably more to do with the size of their noses and the substances that go up them than a common talent that makes them sound similar.

"My singing style is shouty," he says.

"You don't shout on that new song you sing. I don't think you shout that much," replies Paul Davies.

"Oh, I do," replies Shaun, as confident as a wronged washerwoman. "I don't shout when I'm not shouting, but I always end up shouting."

You know what he means. You always know what Shaun Ryder means. He might sound like he's got more beer than brains in his head, but I can assure you Shaun Ryder is a very wise, amusing and cunning Dole City hobgoblin indeed.

Ryder's lyrics are as colourful as Tom Wolfe's *The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby*, yet his subject matter, his delivery and the band's own lifestyle is more in tune with the turd-underfoot alcoholic minimalist writings of Charles Bukowski.

> "We get a reward from our music. It's the rest of the time..."

They are chiselled with alliteration and half-bitter slang, they repeat, they grate, and if you, like the *Observer* critic, think they "fight for articulacy", then at the end of the scrap at least you know they are saying something.

"Tart Tart", the last single, was about a drug dealer who died of a brain haemorrhage, but the lyrics only hinted at this. "Twenty Four Hour Party People" is about just that, 24-hour party people, people for whom freedom of choice or unemployment has cleared the way of job obstacles. As Minnie put it, "*They're just twenty-four-hour party people, plastic face can't smile.*"

They're nearly all on the dole, they get in The Haçienda free, and they're known to travel to parties by foot whatever the distance. Paul cracks jokes about the Job Club adverts ("I'm going along to get my free pen and stamps") and Bez wants to become a full-time blagger like his hero Emmett Grogan.

Not that the party is always a good one, as Paul Davies puts it: "Most people look for a reward from their jobs, but we get a reward from our music. It's the rest of the time, after you've come out of the practice room and you've got nothing to go to, that's when it's bad."

They've got dodgy pasts, they know the number and prices of the cheapest taxis in North Manchester, and they argue most vociferously about the distance to Gaz's house from the pub, whether white bread has more fat in it than brown, and whether or not, like a survey said in the *Mirror*, 60-year-old men in the south are fitter than 13-year-old lads in Salford.

Shaun's girlfriend is an accountant for Rio Tinto Zinc, the last time I spoke to the Corn Beard himself he was about to go down the Housing Benefit, and yet Gaz drives around in his dad's brand-new Ford Cortina.

The catches, contradictions, beauty and despair of Happy Mondays are a thousandfold, so don't tell me their lyrics are inarticulate and meaningless, because most of you will never understand anything about their lifestyles apart from what you see on cliched documentaries and read in left-wing papers written by sons of right-wing businessmen.

**BACK IN THE** pub, Mark can hear the radio and wants to know if it's the racing results, Paul Ryder has been looking at the Laura Ashley wallpaper too long and is seeing pink dots all over Gaz's face, Paul Davies is telling me about how he really wants the band to do well, and Bez and Shaun have dropped their conversation to a whispered hush. Naturally everyone shuts up and listens.

"When we were out in New York, right, for the new Music Seminar," he wheezes. "Me and Bez were with these black guys who were doing crack and one of them turns to me suddenly and goes, 'Hey man, you just spat at me.'"

Shaun has screwed up his face, stuck out his finger, and snarled the sentence. All the time, Bez is rocking slightly backwards and forwards on the sofa, his giant granite carved head nodding.

Shaun continues: "And then a minute later he said, 'Hey man, you're doing it again.' And then he turned round a third time, and you could tell he was coming down off the hit and he was really mad, and he said, 'Right, you're English and you're spitting on me and I fucking hate you.'

"So Bez started snapping at him and we were surrounded by 20 of them and they were really going to do us. And then the first black guy we had met came over and said, 'Hey, they're with me, cool it,' and they let it go. But what it was was Bez was so pissed, he was spitting while he was talking and it kept landing on this guy who thought it was me."

It's 1987 and we've ended up with all sorts of rubbish around us, militant miserablism and extreme escapism is now forced fashion, you spit on them but they still suck you in.

Six rat heads stagger, their fashions snag, their stubble is craggy. Noses are bent, jackets bought at Afflecks, sentences fed on F-words. Mondays are too good to be blue. Something could still snap. *James Brown* •

# "God is a bathtub"

**A meeting with an absurdist new Icelandic band THE SUGARCUBES – and their remarkable singer, Björk. Cats, zombies and sex with God are all on the agenda. "You know," they say, "we can knock anybody into the ground with this brilliant normality of ours."**

— MELODY MAKER OCTOBER 24 —

**IT MUST BE** the full moon.

It was all going along quite comfortably for, ooh, about nine seconds. I'd asked what the album will be like, like it tells me to in the manual. And Björk had replied, "All sorts of things", just like pop stars are supposed to, hereby suggesting a diverse and colourful spectrum of conversational topics. It was around now I opened the floodgates of chaos, perhaps, by saying "What sort of all sorts of things?"

"How it would be to sleep with God," says Einar [Örn Benediktsson, vocalist].

It helps, once again, if you do the Icelandic accents.

"I don't know, because He's never done it to me. If God is a stud with sideburns, I wouldn't fancy Him. But if…"

"It started out like this," interrupts Björk, who wrote the lyric under discussion. "I was walking down a street in Iceland and I just felt in the kind of mood that – as has always been my belief – that God does not exist. But then I thought, if He would, He would be this figure in the sky, sitting in the fattest cloud, keeping it very tidy and clean. In a white shirt, and always very perfect. And so when I been walking down the street – if He did exist – He would come down from His cloud, with marsupial fingers and marble hands. And they would glide over my shoulders, into my dress, and go down and down and down and down, and then… the song ends." »

ILPO MUSTO / REX FEATURES

The Sugarcubes in London, 1986: (l–r) Þór Eldon, Einar, Bragi Ólafsson, Sigtryggur Baldursson and Björk

Is this a fantasy of yours?

"It just fell into my mind. I wouldn't pick it to happen to me. I don't think it would be very nice."

Today Björk is wearing an orange dress shaped like a bell. She is a bit sulky because she is fed up with everyone saying she's some kind of freak. So, when Einar, today wearing a plastic-looking jacket of many colours, begins a long monologue about violence, she takes out her sewing and pursues it diligently.

Later, when we're at the flat where The Sugarcubes are staying in London, she goes across to the kitchen, sets up the ironing board, and begins ironing.

"Irony," comments the drummer, and I think about linguistics. Björk thinks she is perfectly normal. What I wish someone would explain to her is that "as one should be" is not the same as "normal". You only have to see the "Birthday" video in the middle of any party-balloons-crap pop programme to know that next to the way The Sugarcubes are, most else in the medium is worthless. But sadly, it does not define "normal". This I know. The Sugarcubes are positively super-normal. Like Leos Carax films. Like sunshine in winter. Like getting married at your own funeral.

"Birthday" has "done" rather well, which must mean that some of you have a degree of sensibility, know that being naked is always a serious matter, know that to wait is to be and to weep is to do.

Non-smokers may be cowards, but Björk, as it happens, hates drinking. She says so. "I hate to drink." Unless she's dancing. The other night she danced to James Brown records for three hours. Someone points at something on the tube and she bites his hand.

**THE SUGARCUBES ARE** bringing out a second single now, "Cold Sweat". I find it slightly disappointingly conventional but they assure me it has subconscious undercurrents. I'll listen to it again, next time the room is full of temperamental butterflies. The video for this features Einar being crucified and eating money.

"She wrote it as a love song," says Sigtryggur [Baldursson, drummer], somewhat hesitantly.

"But I can still be a… an indie person?"

I nod enthusiastically, as one should to a man named Sigtryggur, but that could be the Brenivin. We'll tell you about Brenivin later.

Meanwhile Einar is still talking about God.

"A guy who jerked off in the bath, then some unsuspecting maiden went into the bath. Then the sperm went unexpectedly into this maiden, and Jesus was born."

Björk is nearly shouting. "Have you ever heard someone say that?"

Um… only Jean-Luc Godard in that film.

"Well I haven't heard of it. So I don't think He exists. This is making a very short and simple lyric a complicated one. So I think we shouldn't talk about it any more."

You have to believe in magic, though.

"Oh yes?" This is Einar. "So God is a bathtub."

A bathtub.

"If not a stud with sideburns."

What do you believe in, then?

"The incredible force of our wonderful songs."

It's Sigtryggur talking now. Sigtryggur has one day off from thinking each week. Usually Monday, but that's not a hard-and-fast rule. The last time Einar got in a fight, Sigtryggur was watching from his car and just drove away, because it was his day off from thinking. Einar respects this.

Also present are Þor Eldon and Bragi Ólafsson. Both are famous poets in Iceland. Bragi has just been awarded two months' "quite high" salary for his last book. He is grateful. You can tell he's grateful because he says, "It's extraordinarily stupid of the Icelandic government." He also says, "You see that painting there, *Silent Waters*? That's really the example of bad taste. Because it's everything you expect from the title. It *is* silent waters. So it's… no use.

So, Sugarcubes. Why do you do what you do to me?

"Writing or playing is just a hobby," begins Einar.

"Some people might think it's silly, but they go… playing golf. What is more stupid than to hit a golf ball made of rubber with a piece of iron and try to put it in a hole? It's just what's a matter of… interest.

"Create or not create? It's just the physical result of our physical presence. You see? To check that we exist. Something comes out of it, instead of just fucking having babies. OK, some band members have fucked and have babies, but at least two members have not fucked yet. We are just rearranging the world around us to fit our non-concept of what the world should be like."

Um. Hang on. One thing at a time. Non-concept, you say?

"Yes, because we don't have any concepts, any philosophy as such. But then it starts creating a life of its own. Like, The Sugarcubes they are alive now. 'Birthday' is breathing, and it would still do so if we died today. So for the two band members who haven't fucked, it will be considered that that's our children. I'm sorry, I mean it."

Björk: "This is his theory, alright? People who haven't had babies have never fucked."

Einar: "Yes! You only have if you have the babies!"

Björk: "Have you got a baby?"

Oh, scattered all over 17 continents. I mean, no.

"Then you haven't fucked!" Einar is leaning forward and breathing into my face. "You don't know what sex is!"

I must say I found this interview rather more eventful than most. Björk saves me from having to think of a razor-sharp spontaneous answer, which is probably just as well.

"Are you busy just now, Einar? Because I could take you in a room and I could tell about the birds and the bees."

Bragi [Bragi Ólafsson, bass]: "I think this home-made philosophy of his is a bit related to a slogan we had when we were playing in a group years ago. It went: 'It doesn't matter what you can do, but what you do.'"

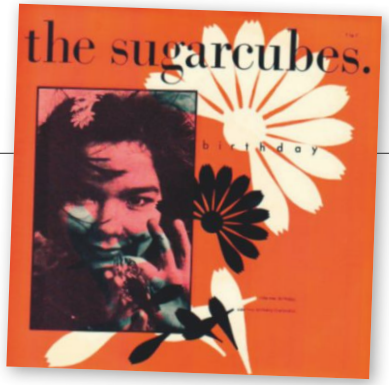
Another popular Icelandic group: Mezzoforte.

"When I was 15, we went once a week to séances. Thor and Odin came through."

John Triumph, Iceland's premier novelist (honestly!) and friend and manager of The Sugarcubes, is having his say. "And the room was full of flower perfume. That's how young kids in Iceland entertain themselves. Go to séances. Between fights."

Björk: "I don't look at me as a person who sings, I look at me as a singers"

ILPO MUSTO / REX FEATURES




"This frightens me," Einar continues, as he is wont to do. "I don't want anyone from the beyond talking to me. Unless I ask, 'Am I born? Do I exist? I don't know that! I don't!"

Yes you do.

"No! I don't! For all we know, we could be dead right now and dreaming this. So, I don't know if I'm here, and why."

But you'll sleep tonight. You'll wake up tomorrow.

"I'm not sure. Honestly, Mr Chris. I AM NOT SURE."

So, if I watched you snore all night, and proved it?

"Then I would say, 'Are you sure you were here the whole night? You might have started dreaming.' I take nothing for granted."

But, Einar, isn't it all complicated enough as it is?

"I know, yes, it is. It's just… I am not sure. The only proof I want now is money. I want to be able to buy compact discs, then I know it's happening now, because from history I know they haven't been previously available."

Yeah. Every time I see a new Bruce Springsteen live remixed B-side I take it as confirmation of my identity…

"Alcohol has been previously available. So by drinking I am maybe re-confirming that I have already existed in the past. You know? I am not a sugarcube! Jesus was conceived in a squeaky-clean bathtub!"

I'm lost. But not in the way you mean.

"I am a singers," contributes Björk. "A singers. I don't look at me as a person who sings, I look at me as a singers. I'm sorry but I have to admit this."

Why do The Sugarcubes try to destroy their songs on stage?

Björk: "I don't know what you're talking about?"

Sigtryggur: "It's the presence of malice. Which is everywhere of course. If you're doing sweet music, the presence of malice gives it another degree."

Einar: "Music is not God. But when music is just music it becomes boring."

Much inter-Icelandic debate ensues.

Björk: "The songs wouldn't work if they were in tune."

Do you ever worry about alienating people?

Einar: "No no no, you can't run after that. It's not our fault that our own development is not a developing thing. We are not behind or ahead of people."

Just… outside?

"No, no, we are the present state of things. We are really very ordinary, even though we drink a lot. It's not our fault everybody else is fucked up. We are the mainstream. The others are the subversives, the perverts. Not us. I am very happy with my video machine. I am very happy with everything. I owe a lot of money, but I am happy with being what I am. Because I don't know what I'm not. If I did, then I'd be unhappy.

"In every television situation comedy, they try and portray how things are, so all the other people see that they lack a semi-detached house, big kitchen, big TV set, and the looks. But I'm so silly that I don't know that I lack that. And therefore I'm happy.

"We are not intellectuals. We are very naive. But the intellectual capacity of people is getting shorter. They demand hooks. The ability for understanding things not as usual is getting lazy. The range is always closing down… conforming… Soon we only will use words like shoot shoot piss piss fuck fuck stab stab."

If you had a slogan for The Sugarcubes, would it be SNIFF IT?

"Yes! How did you know? Or – lick it. Because you'd get a direct connection into us. Bragi buys books to smell them."

Bragi: "There is a strange habit in Iceland of dipping sugarcubes into the coffee and then we suck them."

Einar: "Yes – sniff, lick, suck, whatever. And not in sexual connotations. I don't want to get rude."

Could a deaf person enjoy The Sugarcubes?

"Yeah! Yeah!"

Could a blind person?

"They wouldn't see a multi-coloured event. It's not like taking drugs: none of us take drugs. If you are blind, sniff and listen. If deaf, sniff and feel. It doesn't matter. We don't care. Nothing is more rubbish than when people say, 'Oh well, the sound was a bit dodgy.' We're into yes or no or again."

Björk: "We never need a second opinion. We know."

Last week, The Sugarcubes played with Swans at the Town & Country Club: "We simply got a phone call. But we never 'support' anybody. We only play 'alongside'. We exist in our own right."

Björk has gone polite but quiet again. I nudge her.

"I am getting pretty bored with everybody thinking that we are so weird. People watch me, curiously, with the feeling I'm some kind of freak. Yes, well that's the only thing I don't like."

Sigtryggur: "It's a catch-22. They expect us to act like freaks now."

Einar: "Not just like, Eskimos in disguise, but surrealists… like, let's shit into this teacup, heh heh heh… What disgusted me was the audience at our first concert here, gawping at her. I saw a very definite masculine voyeurism at work."

Björk: "Well – I don't really know, really. There's being here, talking about ourselves, behaving like we're in a band, then there's going back to Iceland, to my boy, and being that again. So, it's two lives! Yes, it's interesting."

Einar: "You want to know who's the biggest bastard in Iceland?"

I was just about to ask…

"Kristján Loftsson. The whale-killer. We want his name in print. Skip the rest of the interview – this is it. I'll write it down for you. He is slowly and surely shitting into his own pants without a nappy."

> "Some people might think it's silly, but they go… playing golf"

**WHALEMEAT AGAIN: SOMEWHERE** around here I should reiterate that The Sugarcubes' first album, *Life's Too Good*, will be out when they've finished the extra five tracks they're recording for it now. This will make 16 songs, all short. "It'll be vaudeville."

Somewhere, too, I should go on about how The Sugarcubes make the adjective "brilliant" mean something again, but that's already clear as a frosty night.

"It's not in our nature to publicly protest. Dubious grounds, we could easily fall into a hot spring."

It's cliche, too.

"Oh, pure death, yes. It means a group is not ideologically but intellectually unsound. Then you get labelled. I ask you now a favour. Can you put a label on The Sugarcubes?"

No. That's the point!

"Exactly. We might be ignorant, we might be morons, but we're not stupid. We do think. Except for him, on Mondays."

What about full moons?

"We turn into cats. Or zombies."

Björk is allergic to cats.

"Because of the Icelandic girl being Miss World, our biggest pop star has his latest song called 'Does Beauty Create Happiness?' It's his job to remind the Icelanders that you don't have everything if you're pretty.

Do you agree with that?

"No. It's too… calculated. Too… nice. When I was staying with my aunt in England when I was 15, she forbid me to use the word 'nice', because it doesn't mean anything. I was to use the word 'thingy'. So, I just talked about 'thingies' all day. And I'm sorry, but I can't think of anything else."

What does create happiness?

"You have to be unhappy for a while, and then you become happy. I think that's the rule. Yes, and very unhappy."

So, you think it's all circles, like The New Seekers?

Einar: "No, life is a straight line and the planet is flat. It is! You know that, don't you? Ah, good. We have met our man."

Sigtryggur: "You know, we can knock anybody into the ground with this brilliant normality of ours."

Björk: "Ha ha ha!"

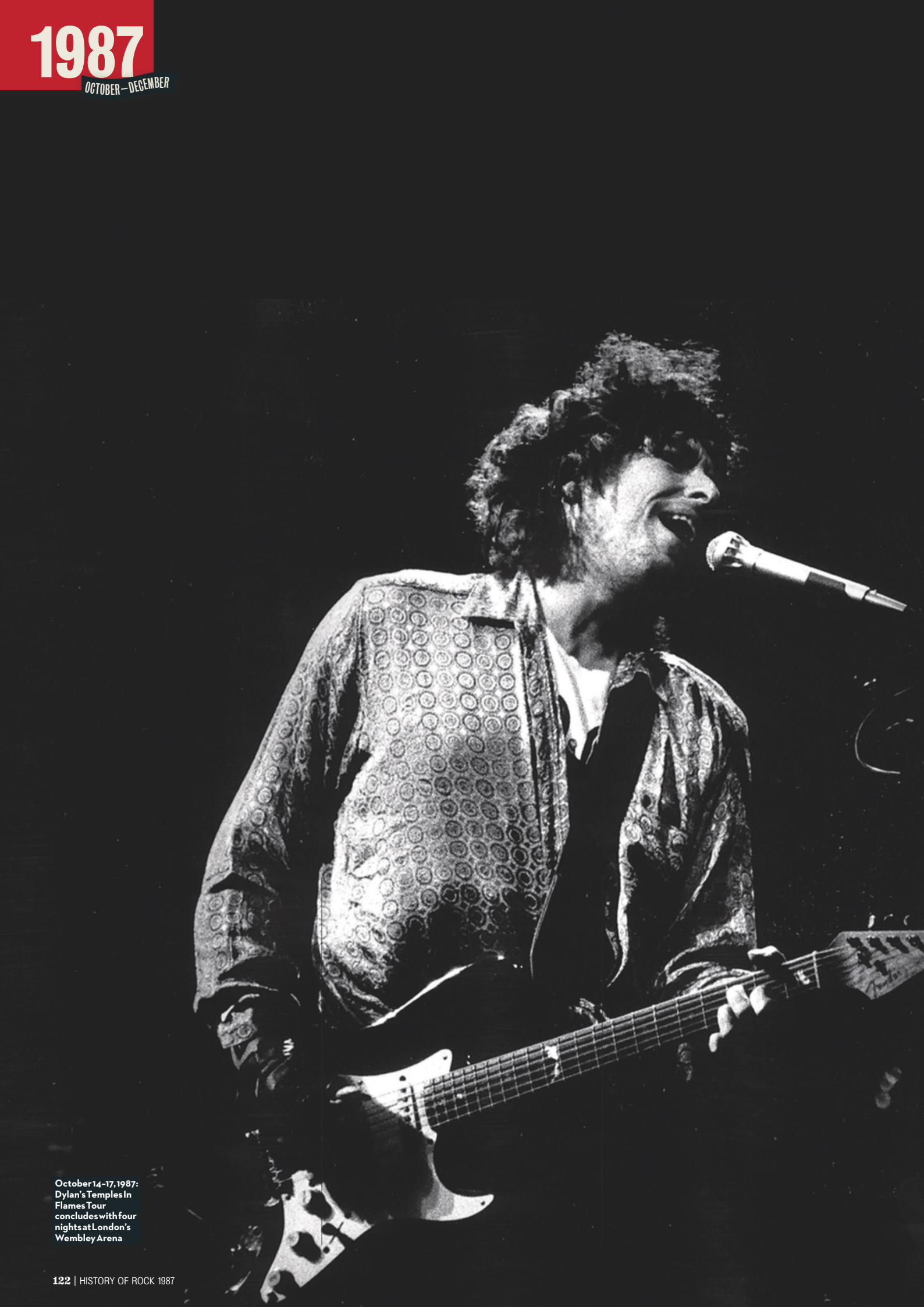
What?

"You shouldn't've said we could talk about anything we liked! Ha ha ha!"

Einar: "OK. Let's go to our place and have some Brenivin."

Some what?

"Brenivin. An Icelandic spirit called The Plague. Or The Black Death. Then you understand our soul." *Chris Roberts* •



October 14–17, 1987: Dylan's Temples In Flames Tour concludes with four nights at London's Wembley Arena

# Astonishing

## MM OCT 24 Bob Dylan is "a vicious, trembling presence" in London.

WEMBLEY ARENA LONDON
LIVE!
OCTOBER 15

**NOW THINK ABOUT** what it must be like to be Bob Dylan; that's when things start to get really weird. What we're talking about here, after all, is someone whose music has made him the most important voice in the lives of millions, nothing less. For more than a quarter of a century, Dylan has been revered, adored, by people for whom he has never been allowed to be ordinary, whose expectations, which have usually been massive, he has had to live up to.

To his credit, Dylan has carried this burden testily. And at an age when he might even be forgiven for merely relaxing in the retrospective admiration for what he has already achieved, he still keeps coming out of his corner fighting. Nostalgists will hopefully have been helplessly confused by the opening show of this Wembley series.

After reassuring sets by Roger McGuinn and the charming Tom Petty, Dylan came rumbling out of the wings like a storm cloud; black, misty, threatening a downpour, a vicious, trembling presence. He looked like something out of *Ulzana's Raid*, a startling comanchero phantom, a bandana wrapped around his head, gaunt-featured, mad-eyed, grubby silk shirt tied in a knot around his waist, boot-heels thumping the stage, side-swiping chords from an electric guitar as he led The Heartbreakers through a pummelling, broken-veined "Like A Rolling Stone".

*This*, as an opening shot, a blood-red bullet, fired into the night, Petty and his commendable henchmen matching Dylan ricochet for ricochet, never too reverential, but giving him lots of room, on their toes from the off, ready for anything, which would quickly turn out to be plenty, Benmont Tench on keyboards and drummer Stan Lynch consistently outstanding. Dylan's apparent unpredictability made for a lot of tension. I couldn't take my eyes off him, neither could the band, as a fierce "Maggie's Farm" swelled suddenly into the gospel roar of "Forever Young" (heart-tugging, a bruised, delicious hymn), and quickly followed by a rollicking, honky-tonk reading of "I'll Be Your Baby Tonight".

"I Want You" built from a cautious start, just a sketch really, into a torrent of whirling rhymes; "The Ballad Of Frankie Lee And Judas Priest" was amused, amusing, a spinning of outlandish tales, Dylan crouched, ready for takeoff, The Heartbreakers hanging on his every twisting nuance, wondering where the hell he was going next, which turned out to be a version of "Don't Think Twice, It's Alright", startling in its feral beauty.

After just about an hour, Dylan brought an abrupt halt to everything with a raging, delirious "Shot Of Love", which ended with a momentous acceleration into something that resembled the apocalyptic ballroom rumble of the Stones' "Gimme Shelter". There were two encores. A version of "Chimes Of Freedom" with McGuinn's harmonies, still celestial after all these years, supporting Dylan's howling, and a version of the nightmarish "In The Garden" that for sheer two-chord intensity and riffing calamity could've rivalled "Sister Ray".

**Dylan crouched, ready for takeoff, The Heartbreakers hanging on every twisting nuance**

This had been a fiercely confrontational performance that took no prisoners, refused to pander to the past, addressed itself to a surprisingly young audience – there were women dancing here, mesmerised by Dylan – and which confounded reports that the great man was currently operating on some kind of remote control. At Wembley, last Wednesday, Dylan seemed determined to take everything to the limit and beyond, to screw preconceptions about what he is still capable of to the table. If it were possible for Dylan and this band to have arrived unannounced for a gig at the Mean Fiddler or the Town & Country, there would be a queue of young writers on this paper clamouring for them to be front-paged, probably pronto. Astonishing is a word that comes to mind, reflecting on this show, and for once it's justified. *Allan Jones*

"Never too reverential": Tom Petty with Dylan on stage at Wembley

DAVID ROSE / REX FEATURES, PETER STILL / GETTY

"Brix has added some form of sense to my life," says Mark E Smith of his US-born, guitar-playing wife (right)

# "I've never met anybody like me"

**THE FALL release "Hit The North", and Mark E Smith steps into character as rock's most interesting curmudgeon in this revealing "at home" interview. "The people I dislike I can take the piss out of," he says, "which gives me as much pleasure as if they were someone I did get on with."**

— NME OCTOBER 31 —

**SUNDAY NIGHT WITH** Mark and Brix at their home in Prestwich, North Manchester, three roads away from James Anderton's police training centre.

A gun-metal-grey Mercedes shines in the drive, Claus Castenskiold paintings stare down from the walls, and husband and wife relax in their black V-neck Armani jumper and big fun Mickey Mouse slippers respectively.

On the television, a bag of pontificating pretension called Morrissey is blathering on about "how weird" life is, how sad it must be to be working class and normal, and how amazingly talented his band were. It is like watching a tribute to Shakin' Stevens with Elvis Presley at your side. »

PAUL COX

Morrissey may be winning the hearts of the *Observer Magazine*-reading "intellectuals" with his sluggish facial twitches and pseudo-sophisticated pauses for thought, but in the fish-and-chip-eating world of Mark E Smith and James KH Brown he is unwittingly burying the memory of The Smiths as an interesting band under a mud-pile of embarrassment.

The two of us are in stitches, Brix, who is two days later to perform a stunning live set at London's ICA with ex-Smiths Mike Joyce, Andy Rourke and Craig Gannon as part of her Adult Net, has already left the room in disgust at our continuing contempt for the Chubby Bard of Whalley Range, who now resides in Chelsea.

Unlike Morrissey, who has become a professional Mancunian, Mark Smith will never lose his sense of realism to the grabbing hands of romantic escapism. His washerwoman bitching ("You think I'm like an old woman?" Yes, Mark, I think you're like an old woman), his fierce pride, his ever-increasing degrees of integrity and maturity, and his sense of humour will always see to that. If they fail, there is always the possibility of insanity.

**DESPITE A PUBLIC** image that makes Rudolph Hess look like Mother Teresa, Smith has continued, for a decade, to write lyrics which tower above the short-sighted attempts of his contemporaries, of whom he recognises only Kevin Rowland and Pete Wylie as being any good.

His exhaustive hunger for literature, and his equally demanding thirst for contemporary information, have created a style which, if freed from the ropes of rock music, would horrify the book world. That the first four volumes on his shelves are Wyndham Lewis's *Blast 1* and *Blast 2*, a historical biography, and the *Georgie Best Soccer Annual 1975*, sums up his literary influences acutely.

Ever since The Fall's inception in 1977, Smith has been continually collecting lyric-worthy information and channelling physical and mental creative energy into building the band's musical character. Whether it be the sixth-of-a-ton sonic attack of The Fall's numerous highly rated drummers, MES's own vocal screeches, or the tormented silences that so often pre-empted both of these, Fall songs have always been wracked by an intimidating and uncontrollable sense of extremity.

The Fall as a band, whilst maintaining this extremity, have developed, almost invisibly, from a bad-tempered ball of hate and insecurity into a fully functioning Top 40-scoring pop group.

They have squeezed the repetitious, badly organised and often neurotic wall of noise into a malleable but tense brand of horror-pop.

Smith's lyrics are still verbal montages of headlines, advertising logos, Mancunian slang, abbreviations, beatnik speak, computer jargon and classic prose, but the overall sound of new single

PAUL COX

"Hit The North" finds the narky Manc six-piece far, far away from the hectic days of "Totally Wired" and "Bingo Master's Breakout", certainly much further away than anyone in The Fall No 1 could have imagined.

The truth of the matter is that Mark Edward Smith is no longer the frail, foul-mouthed young boy in tank tops whose bile stung the skin of all of those it landed upon.

Smith, by his own admission, is maturing, and growing more confident with age. Over the past four years he has changed from being a tyrannical whisky-guzzling speed kind into a genial 30-year-old wit who enjoys the friendship and loyalty of his band, and the stability of his marriage.

The drunken Mark E Smith who laughs at, ridicules and repeatedly sets right Morrissey's *South Bank Show* is the nearest the man comes to behaving like the beast you, the public, believe him to be. None of his mirth was fuelled with bitterness, only a sardonic disbelief at Morrissey's lack of style.

As we settle down around the wooden table he writes upon, my aim is not to fill my tape recorder with spiteful and shocking gems of vitriol, but to expose the side the public never see. I want to make Mark, the herald angel, sing.

**The Fall in 1987: (l–r) Simon Wolstencroft, Steve Hanley, Marcia Schofield, Mark E, Brix and Craig Scanlon**

Under the collective gaze of Marlon Brando, Peter Lorre, two Barbie Dolls, and the lop-sided squint of a pair of Manchester City footballers stuck, courtesy of Panini, onto the back of last year's G-Mex Festival programme, Smith is in good humour. In fact, I have rarely known him not to be. One of many demo tapes sent to him, "Dick Vomit, NY '82", catches my eye.

"That guy got knocked down and went into a coma, and all he had on him was some small change and a tape of *This Nation's Saving Grace*, so the hospital got in touch with us to see if we knew him. We sent some music and a message back and they played it to him."

Did he wake up?

"No. Ha ha ha, but he got better eventually though, and then sent us that demo. It's awful."

To understand The Fall's rejuvenation, you must understand the importance of the new members. The arrival of Simon Woolstencroft on drums, Marcia and Simon Rogers on keyboards, and Brix on guitar, has given the old core of Mark, Steve Hanley, and Craig Scanlon a refreshing kick up the arse. Brix and Marcia compare their input into the band to the way stale male conversation can be brought to life by a woman's point of view.

"I think it's good that both Marcia and I can play our instruments and are not just there to be looked at," Mrs Smith tells me.

"I don't think Simon Woolstencroft gets enough credit," continues her husband. "He's not a calm influence, but he's a very soothing kind of guy.

"It sounds daft, but our drummers in the past have always been a bit of a pain; always brilliant, but always a pain. I used to lay awake at night knowing what they were doing and what they were going to do, but with Simon I just forget about him – hah ha ha ha, no, you know what I mean. He comes round a lot to see us, just to chat and stuff, which is good."

> "They'd have us tied up against lamp posts, hitting us with sticks"

There's a change of atmosphere in the band now, Mark, the physical tension has been channelled into musical tension.

"You find it's better therapy as well. We did this festival earlier this year with Nick Cave and the Swans, and Butthole Surfers, and it was interesting seeing them still making the same mistakes we used to make, and thinking they were great for it. Like we were the only ones to ask for a separate dressing room and they were calling us 'pop stars' for it.

"We had to walk through these really disgusting Butthole Surfers, little spoilt American kids who can't even be bothered to wash, you know, standing around in their underpants. And they were giving us this 'pop stars' shit and Thommo, our tour manager, turned to them and says, 'Look, it's nothing to do with being fucking pop stars, it's to do with being fucking professional, which is something fucking Butthole Surfers will never be.' And this little kid's shitting himself. They didn't even make it to the next gig, their bus broke down or something.

"I just got sick of being pissed around and ripped off. Brix's arrival was a good influence on me, because I tend to lose perspective and things like that. Also Steve and Craig are great to have in the band, they're very loyal. People suggest they're 'yes men', but they're not; they wouldn't be in it if they were. They put as much in as anybody.

"Brix has added some form of sense to my life, she's someone I can react against or build around. Otherwise I'd be thinking about the band around the clock, which is what I was like.

"On the American tour when I met Brix I was so obsessed with things like 'We're not playing any old numbers' that we were playing all the numbers from *Perverted By Language*, which we hardly knew and which didn't even get released for another six months."

**Has there ever been anyone outside your family who has been very influential on your life?**

"There was one person, this half-Irish guy called Thomas, who I grew up with, who was a very good friend of mine. He was a few years older than me and he taught me all the jokes I know and everything.

"He taught me a lot about humour. He was very scathing about fashion, bell bottoms and skinheads and that, that was when I was about 13. Me and him were very close, we used to go round taking the piss out of people. He did affect me, but I couldn't say how. I haven't seen him in years.

"Apparently he never goes out of the house much now, but he was always like that. Even later on, when I'd go round and ask him if he was coming to the pub, he'd say, 'Yeah, I'll just go and change me socks,' and he'd be up there an hour. Then he'd come back and he'd have two different socks on.

"Like you used to have gangs around here, and me and Thomas would always go from gang to gang, and always could. So if we joined one, we'd get attacked by the other.

"So they'd have us tied up against lamp posts and they'd be hitting us with sticks. And Thomas would be going, 'Oh, where did you get them jeans from?' or 'That bloody haircut you've got, it's fantastic.' And you just had to laugh, because they didn't even know he was taking the piss. And they'd go, 'Oh, you're just mad, you are.'

"And you'd be crying and they thought it was because they were hitting you, but it was with laughter, they were that stupid."

"We used to have names for all our enemies, like Simon Of Diarrhoea, and we'd make up stories about how they'd go home and dip their heads in buckets of diarrhoea. We used to go to these synagogue youth clubs as well and pretend we were Jewish.

"He'd have like a suit jacket on, with fucking big lapels on, and a tie, and a rotten shirt which had a fucking hole in it, and pants that were falling to bits, but he'd carry it off. And he'd go, 'I've just come back from the casino, won £100', and all these rich kids would be totally taken in by it.

"And he used to tell them how to make Irish bacon sandwiches, and he'd put on an Irish accent. 'And the best bit is when you get the cold tea out of the pot, you put it in the frying pan, you get a little bit of lard off the bottom of an old pan, you mix it in with the cold tea, then you stir it round like this. And any stale bits of bread you've got, throw them in, then you throw the bacon in on top.' He used to say all this like it really was some ethnic recipe." »

**Do you have any friends today whose closeness is inspiring?**
"I went through a thing about six months ago when I thought, 'Fucking hell, I've been nice to a lot of people and they're not my friends any more', and I started to crave company again.

"There's a song on the LP, which we do live, called 'My Friends You Can Count On One Hand', and you can. It's funny who you regard as your friends. Like I regard Gavin from The Virgin Prunes as a good friend even though I hardly every write to him and he hardly ever writes to me, but he's still a good friend. It's something that you can't get rid of, not that I want to."

**Does The Fall maintain your sanity?**
"Not particularly, no. I think I'd be alright without it. I could write, I suppose. I have a lot of feeling and sympathy towards writers. Like I read the book reviews in *The Listener* and some of the reviews in there are brilliant, and you know the guy who wrote it is probably getting by on £10 a week, and they've done a nice job. Then you get the highest level of journalism, Bernard Levin or what have you, and they're all talking out of their arse. I thought it was good Billy Bragg writing that letter in about him."

**Does the idea of writing without the protection of the music intimidate you? Like that article you wrote for the *NME* two Xmases ago…**
"Yeah? He said, sniggering."

**…the whole style of it was very defensive.**
"Yeah, you're right, it was very dense. I was looking at it the other day, funnily enough."

**It was amusing but it was very protective, impenetrable…**
"I know exactly what you mean. I wrote it at Brix's grandparents' in America and they said, 'What the hell are you going on about?' And I read it and thought, 'What the hell *am* I going on about?' 'Protective' is the word; I didn't want to impress by messing around with the words, I didn't want it to be like the usual 'pop star writes' stuff. You know, nicked from a book like that Housemartins guy, or some second-hand opinion Paul Weller's just read on some crap Labour Party leaflet. But it's like you go a bit crazy because you're unleashed – you think, 'Heh heh, I don't have to write any music around this fucking piece."

# Mark E Smith's Ins and Outs

**NME OCT 31** The Fall frontman conducts his own "which trial".

**INS**

Sliced white bread with additives
The Seeds' disastrous blues LP
The Seeds disastrous *March Of The Flower Children*' LP
Jewish guys in new cars with their shirts open and long hair
Groups that shave and wash regularly
Ultra-flash black people
Asian pop groups
Hippyless German groups
Irish whiskey
Jed Clampett
Mancunian rap groups
British Telecom
Saul Bellow
Granada Video Hire
Bikers who work with cement and ladders
Franco-Prussian War
Boer War
Wakefield (SLAG!)
Glasgow
American wrestling
Mexicans
Gary Davies
Tommy Docherty
Homebrew
Embassy Mild
Embassy Filter
The Paras
South London
Richard Stark
James Cain
Arthur Machen
Geological maps
Woody Woodpecker
Gene Vincent's backing vocalists
The Mothers Of Invention

**OUTS**

Brown bread with bits in it
All Sunday papers
Mature guys with ponytails
Scotch pop groups featuring pseudo intellectuals
The Cure's one record
All Welsh groups
All new American groups
All Dutch groups
Anything connected with New Model Army
Chablis wine
Vietnam War
Iran/Iraq War
Mexican food
Berlin
Leeds
American football
Mike Smith
Nescafé
All fruit juice
Hoddle and Waddle
Embassy No 1
Marlboro 100's
Royal Air Force
Eddie Murphy
British science fiction
Stephen King
All new American and British cartoons
British Electricity
France (permanent)
Martin Amis
Pop stars in new silver cars
Rock on television
Plastic grebos in Doctor Martens boots. (You'd never get a real biker to wear them.)

SMITH'S OWN WRITING is, and always has been, The Fall's strength. Never-ending macabre time-scapes, seconds snatched, imaginations tortured. He takes recognisable everyday images and figures (pop groups, politicians, religious leaders, brands of milk) and slots them into scenarios which present an uncomfortably startling interpretation of society.

In "Hit The North", originally commissioned by the Lancs Tourist Office (ha ha), James Anderton appears – not that an amplified voiceover bellows, 'The bit about Anderton is coming!' But it's a talent Smith has whereby he can include a character so subtly while still making his presence felt so ominously.

Writing much of his work when unable to sleep at night in London, or first thing in the morning "while you're fresh but there are still residues of dreams to work from", Smith sees his work not only as contemporary but futuristic as well.

"Like 'Kicker Conspiracy', it's what everybody's saying about soccer nowadays. I don't care what anybody says, I was saying it four years ago."

Likewise, he says it's years since he deliberately wrote under the influence of amphetamines. Not that he condemns it, he simply claims it's no longer necessary.

"The thing about writing under the influence of alcohol, or anything, is you lose you objectivity and that's very good. Any stimulant is good for writing.

Sartre, who I never liked, used to get through 60 cigarettes a day, 10 bottles of wine, five grams of amphetamine, and other barbiturates. And that's quite common with a lot of writers. Not that you can do it today, because there's been this big clampdown. Which I think is ridiculous."

**Do you think your biggest influence is contempt for society?**
"Well, I think there are far more contemptuous societies around the world, I don't think people realise that for a start. I don't know, what I am trying to do is get other people to click onto the same things I'm clicking onto.

"That's the pleasure I want to give people. You know like when you read a book and you read a chapter and it's something you've always instinctively felt or known to be right. And it hits you like 'I've always thought that'. That's what I want to do."

**Do you ever get that sort of reaction from meeting people?**
"Well I've never met anybody like me, but yeah, I guess I do sometimes. I tend to like people a lot and dislike people; I don't dislike people so much. I usually find the people I dislike I can take the piss out of, which gives me as much pleasure as if they were someone I did get on with."

**SMITH'S BIGGEST FAILING** as a writer is his inability to communicate his own strong sense of humour. Whereas in person his persistently cruel but hilarious humour, always punctuated with his crazy spluttering giggle and laugh, runs amok freely, any humour communicated through his lyrics is restrained and presented quite unnoticeably, like the perverse delight that grips the tale of the "Bournemouth Runner" on last year's *Bend Sinister*.

**Do you think you do your sense of humour justice in your writing?**
"Well, I've only really developed that side quite recently. It's things I've always laughed at in the back of my mind; I just say them now, and they all get laughs as well. I've been thinking about that this last couple of months, if I could just get it down, but the idea of writing it down just strikes me as being so laborious. Comedy is very difficult.

"Something like 'US 80's 90's' is supposed to be funny, it just doesn't come over as that. And 'Terry Waite' was meant to be funny, but fucking hell, you don't want to make that funny any more.

"I think you're right about the 'Bournemouth Runner'. Did I ever tell you we found out who it was? We got a letter off him which said, (*adopts creepy voice*) 'I am the Bournemouth Runner', and it turns out he's like the biggest football hooligan in Bournemouth, and he's a Fall fan, coincidentally.

"And he bought *Bend Sinister* and put it on and this track comes on and he couldn't believe it. And he went round telling everybody, and he painted it on his back apparently, and he's one of these people who get put in jail every week for fighting.

"He tried, every night of the southern tour, to nick the backdrop, and on the last eff-ing night, in five minutes while no one was looking, he got it. Good on him, actually. Ha ha ha."

This is the only sort of humour present in Fall songs.

**The rise of your own sense of humour runs in time with the band's recent success and development.**
"Yes, it makes a lot of difference. I've found that if I'm like that with the band it keeps morale up, and the band love it, and they've been a lot more warmer to me since I've been more like that. It's a safety valve as well. Another thing is you shouldn't put pressure on your friends.

"I always hate it when somebody's in a nervous state and they lay it on everybody else. The Yanks call it 'buckets of tension', because I can always tell when someone's upset in a room.

"So a lot of it is to help that. Like you get to a gig and there's a gang of Hell's Angels outside and you've got to walk through them to get in, and you feel a lot better for it. But yeah, I think I should bring it out more, also you get a lot more confident as you get older."

**When we talked about Neal Cassady yesterday and you interpreted his hammer swinging as a defence mechanism, it occurred to me that all the obnoxious comments you've come out with in your time – "Andy Kershaw needs a kick in the balls", "They should send contraceptives, not food, to Ethiopia" – are your hammers, your defence.**
"Ha ha ha, yeah. Well, with a lot of things like that Ethiopia thing, when that came out I read it and thought, 'Fucking hell', you know what I mean? What a thing to say about anybody, to even consider it, you know. And then you get all these really horrible people going, 'Oh great, I've always thought that', you know, ha ha ha.

"But I do have that capacity in interviews where I say things, and it's like a lot of my songs, I say 'em and I haven't got a clue what I'm on about, and they come true.

"It's funny because the next time I was in the States after I'd said that, I fucking picked up the fucking *Washington Post*, the director of Ethiopia's famine… the famine commissioner or whatever he was, had defected to America. And he's got three houses in America already, right? What's the famine director of Ethiopia doing with three houses in America? And there's bands going out and playing for nothing; you know what are they trying to tell us, man?

"I just couldn't believe that. And he defected to the States. Probably fucking out of our money out of the Ethiopian charity. You never hear about that, no fucker'll ever tell us about that.

"And then, you know, then I think, 'You were half right, Mark.' And also, it's to prove a point that you're not going along with everyone else, a big-headed thing."

> "I'm trying to get people to click onto things I'm clicking onto"

**YOU SEE, HE** can still rant. The wild-eyed Salford bigot with the mouth is still within Mark Smith, but that side of him has become unnecessary with maturity. Smith is still as opinionated as ever, but nowadays his thoughts tend to ring through with degrees of bizarre, but straightforward, sense.

It's his advanced sense of history – he frequently reads biographies, history books and sociological texts when other people are gobbling up the Sundays – that make his political comment (eg, Ethiopia) seem so shocking.

"It's funny actually, because the other day I was laughing me head off in here and Brix came in and asked me what was up and I told her.

"I'd been watching this farming programme about the EEC, and they were interviewing this farmer about it and he told them he hadn't been in favour of joining the Common Market, and when they asked him why he just said, 'I've just found that it's usually the most bloody stupid idea imaginable.'

"And I thought that was a really far-out thing to say, you know."

The Fall are inspired, Mark Smith will always be SLANG King.

*James Brown* ●

DAVE HOGAN / GETTY, PETER BROOKER / REX FEATURES

Chuck D (left) and Flavor Flav outside Def Jam Recordings' offices, New York City

# "Cracking heads with noise"

**A meeting with hip hop's most exciting group, PUBLIC ENEMY. The band's fusion of rock, soul and politics isn't without friction, though. Both Chuck D and Professor Griff throw down some challenging assertions, but then "uncertainty is bullshit, as far as black people are concerned", Chuck says.**

— MELODY MAKER OCTOBER 17 —

**GET THIS. PUBLIC** Enemy are a superlative rock band. Everything about them, from their attitude – (renegade street cool given extra edge by a fierce dose of radical chic) to their sound (an implacable juggernaut of grunge-metal riffs, white noise, dub-space and galvanised R&B beats) puts them in our camp, and dead sets them against the designer soul we all abhor, the smooth, suave, placatory pseudo-sophistication that smothers the entire surface of Planet Pop.

However you define "rock" – urgency, aggression, vehemence, the will both to face reality and to exceed its limits, or just as big noise – Public Enemy fit the bill. So pay attention, suckers.

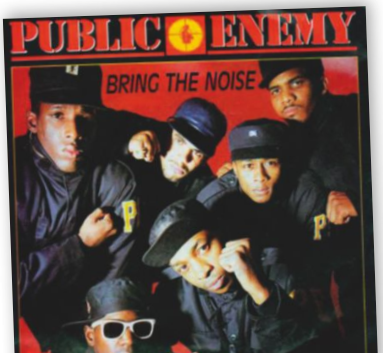
I'm in the offices of Rush Management, sister company of Def Jam, located in Manhattan's Lower East Side not far from the Bowery (as in "bum") and CBGB. Sat opposite is the articulate and emphatic Chuck D, chief firebrand and ranting poet of Public Enemy, "the Black Panthers of rap". And I'm asking Chuck if this monstrous, brutal noise of theirs actually belongs to the category of black music any more, or does it (as I believe) represent a complete break from black pop tradition?

Chuck doesn't quite agree: "Hip hop is black because it uses elements of soul and R&B – the tension, the friction – that have been lost. Most music made by black people today is caught up in synthesized over-production, it's trying to cross over, and it sounds grey."

As in bleached out, whitified, Burchill's beigebeat?

"No, just grey, period. Rap music has more soul than any of this so-called soul."

Hmm, can't see it myself, can't really relate hip hop's frigid, heartless solipsism to soul's limpid, outreaching warmth. I reckon »




LAWRENCE WATSON

February 11, 1987: Public Enemy's Chuck D on stage with a member of Security Of The First World at Hammersmith Odeon, West London

Chuck D's belief in a continuity between R&B and hip hop is a kind of moral conviction (Chuck sets great store in blacks having a consciousness of their history). I can't see any precedents in black pop for the harsh drone-squall of "Terminator X Speaks With His Hands", for the piercing blare of unidentifiable sound on the extraordinary "Rebel Without A Pause", nor for the way these noises are repeated mechanically, inexpressively, without inflection, wholly alienated from the human touch, in an endless cycle of attrition.

Chuck, where soul and funk are about getting loose and grooving, your kind of hardcore hip hop is wound up, clenched; it's hardly a release, more like further harassment.

"What we like to do is take elements from soul that make you feel good and draw you in, and put those sounds and beats next to noises that are gonna push you away. So the listener is kind of coming and going, walking a line, thinking, 'Oh lord, turn that off', and at the same time not wanting to turn it off."

This is the opposite of fusion: a kind of suspended-animation fission, where inconsistent sounds are frozen in mutual contradiction, within the same soundspace.

"It's a conscious process. Records like 'Public Enemy Number One' take a helluva long time to mix, 'cos it's very easy to turn people off, but not so easy to get a balance between turning people on and harassing them."

What happens technically?

"The sampled sounds come from anywhere. Take 'Rebel Without A Pause'. A lot of people said that noise came from a James Brown grunt, but what they didn't realise was that it was a blend of the grunt and a Miles Davis trumpet, which produced a sound that wavered. And then we took that tone and stretched it. The drone on 'Terminator X Speaks' and 'MPE' is a backwards fire truck!"

Amazingly, "Rebel", the B-side from the last single that has now become a club sensation and a highly sought-after rarity, isn't going to be given another push, although it is appearing on the next album. Instead, there's another single off the *Yo! Bum Rush The Show* album: "Sophisticated" (the "Bitch" of the original title and "all the curses" have been excised to court radio) backed by a new track, "Bring The Noise", which is appearing on the soundtrack of the movie of *Less Than Zero*.

"It's a pumpin' track, 109 beats per minute, which is fast for hip hop. It's a gamble."

## Death to disco

**CHUCK D ADHERES** to the Def Jam party line: that rap is black rock'n'roll, that it's based around rock'n'roll's 4/4 beat rather than disco's pulse beat, that its renegade, vandalistic attitude is the antithesis of disco's aspirations to showbiz acceptance.

"My thing is I don't like house music. I first heard it as a DJ, when I was doing radio shows, and I said then that I thought the beats lacked soul, they didn't move you. Certainly you could move to it, by choice, but those beats don't move you like a 4/4 beat does. You can use that disco pulse beat, but you have to have something that's *funky* in there, a bassline, otherwise you just got all these drum machines playing like a load of metronomes; I think it's *easy* to make those kind of records.

"I like that MARRS record 'cos it mixes up house with hip hop, but Chicago house, like go-go, is [my man!] overrated, and you can tell because neither house nor go-go has sparked in other areas. Whereas hip hop, which has been kept down 'cos it's the young black man speaking LOUD, has broken out all over – in the South, in California, in Britain, Europe, Japan…

"And I dislike the scene that's based around house… It's 'sophisticated', anti-black, anti-culture, anti-feel, the most artificial shit I ever heard. It represents the gay scene, it's separating blacks from their past and their culture, it's upwardly mobile. People see the music as a luxury item, a social status thing, 'something to elevate me from all that b-boy shit I was into when I was a teenager, something to lift me from my normal surroundings' – and I hate that shit, I HATE it. It's not so much the music as the attitude that goes along with it – 'Don't speak loud, dance to the music.' It's BULLSHIT."

Trad-rock objections to disco, these, but the point is that this magical dissolution of origins, of class, race and sexual differences, is what the dancefloor is all about. House constructs its ideal consumer as a biracial androgyne, lost in a swirl of polymorphous sensuality and fantasy glamour, lost for words and lost to the world. Immediately outside the club, the world and all its differences impinge: people kill each other on the doorstep of paradise.

"Hip hop and rock have *attitude* – the idea that if you're upset about something, you express it through your music; if you like something, you express it through the music. This is something that house does not do. It's completely expressionless. And, for a lot of blacks, it's just something to support if you don't want to be into hip hop, for whatever reasons."

## Rebel with a cause

**THEY TRY, OH** but they do try. Whenever left-inclined subcultural theorists encounter a black pop culture, they always follow the same syllogistic reasoning. Blacks are an oppressed class. Such-and-such is a music of black origin. Therefore, such-and-such a music must be animated, at however sublimated and submerged a level, by currents of resistance to the-way-things-are.

Often, the desperation to locate such micro-resistance to uncover a subtext of cultural dissidence results in bizarre interpretations. So the venerable Dr Paul Gilroy can argue in *City Limits* that Eric B and Rakim's "Paid In Full" is a "demystification of their means of production".

Demystification, eh? The guys are on the make, they want in, they're counting their money, and if they're not as cynical as Schoolly D (who won't put out unless he's paid in full, IN ADVANCE), it's still hardly worth celebrating. So much for all the cant about hip hop serving a community. The trouble with hip hop is that, no matter how you juggle the subcultural arithmetic, the end product is not going to be a clearly defined "contribution to the struggle". The politics of hip hop occupy a different space altogether. Just take Public Enemy.

Chuck D's political orientation derives from the inspiration of the Black Panthers, the '60s black activists. "It's something I'm still learning about, so I don't know how much I can tell you. Right now, we've been meeting up with some former Panthers from the Oakland area, California, where the Black Panthers first started. There were a lot of racial problems in that area, and what the Panthers did was to structure and organise a force that represented order and strength to the community. They started off peacefully, but as their demands got rejected, they grew more militant. We're meeting up with ex-Panthers and we're trying to spark off a revival.

"Louis Farrakhan [a Black Muslim leader from Chicago – and crony of Jesse Jackson – whose anti-Semitic opinions severely embarrassed the latter during the last campaign for the presidency] is interested in our programme to revitalise and re-educate black youth. We want to build self-respect and a sense of community, because blacks are in a sorry state."

What caused this demoralisation and debility?

"There was complacency in the '70s, after the civil rights victories of the '60s. Plus some of our leaders were killed off, others sold out or fled. There was propaganda by the state to make it seem like things had changed, a policy of tokenism elevating a few blacks to positions of public prominence, on TV shows and stuff, while the rest was held down. Blacks couldn't understand how they'd suddenly got these advantages, and so they forgot, they got lazy, they failed to teach their young what they had been taught in the '60s about our history and culture, about how tight we should be. And so there was a loss of identity – we began to think we were accepted as Americans, when in fact we *still* face a double standard every minute of our lives."

Has there been no improvement in attitudes and opportunities whatsoever? I thought the whole Def Jam stable, for instance, came from a middle-class, suburban background…

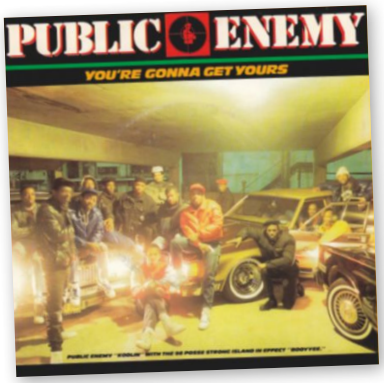
"People go on about this, about us having cars when we were kids, but I know, a black suburban neighbourhood is still a black neighbourhood.

"Black America is suburban – places like the New York ghetto aren't the norm. What we need is to build a sense of community and a sense of business. We're in a capitalist society, we can't overthrow this government, so we must learn to use the system."

So your vision of how to change things isn't socialist or collectivist…

"Only among ourselves, black people. I have… socialistic beliefs, but I also have an awareness of what's real and feasible. Obviously, for America to survive it'll have to become socialistic, ultimately, 'cos the system's crumbling now. But in the meantime we have to stand on our feet, we can't wait. We have to raise ourselves, because nobody else will do it for us."

The meantime is a mean time. Compare '70s "political" soul with Public Enemy. With *What's Goin' On*, "Love Train", "Why Can't We Live Together?", "We Gotta Have Peace", as well as pristine woe, you also got a glimpse, in the angelic purity of the harmonies and arrangements, of a utopian vision of how things should be – a rainbow coalition of love and equality. Compare the plaintiveness of "Backstabbers" with the vengeful "You're Gonna Get Yours". With Public Enemy there's no vision of the perfect world that is the goal of struggle, there is only a faithful sonic analogue for the disharmonious, fraught social environment and a fetishisation of the state of being prepared, masked and armoured, to deal with it. Public Enemy are hooked on the glamour of the means of militancy and mobilisation, barely aware of the vague halcyon end.




"We're meeting with ex-Panthers, trying to spark a revival"

Would he even like it if there was integration?

"Once again, we're talking fantasy, man! Of course I'd like it if everybody white married somebody black and then the next generations were all black. Then there'd be no double standard, except the kind of sick, fucked-up thing black people have among themselves that makes them judge between different shades of darkness.

"But this integration is never gonna happen. So people should stick to their own. Without a strong sense of black consciousness, there's no cohesion, and no survival. The Chinese, the Jews, they stick together, deal with each other; blacks don't."

Do you think maybe rap reflects that lack of community, what with all the rivalry between MCs and between posses, all against all?

"Yeah – but inside each and every rapper there's something that's saying, 'I'm yelling out loud for shit that ain't right.' Now he don't know what, 'cos he's uneducated. A rapper speaks out loud, and really he's asking for help. 'Cos, for the last 15 years, no information has been given to him about the system and so he don't understand why he acts the way he acts."

We're back with subcultural theory again – daily life as rife with acts of micro-resistance, pre-conscious skirmishes with bourgeois »

DAVID CORIO / GETTY

ideological hegemony, unarticulated rage – if only it could be channelled into revolution! (The Black Panthers tried to do just that, taking the fact of young black male street criminality and trying to radicalise it.)

Or there's the situationist dream that all you needed to initiate total revolution was a federation of teenage delinquent gangs – the conclusion of "Too Much Posse"?!

## Soul on ice

**THROUGHOUT POPULAR CULTURE**, being black is being installed as a signifier of being more human. From the histrionics of George Michael and Mick Hucknall to the Kronenbourg ads (a young, sexually indeterminate *City Limits*-reading man, who plays saxophone, is tutored in reaching into the depths of his soul by a wizened black master of the instrument – the slogan: "A Different Kind Of Strength"), blackness is being elaborated as a model of oneness with your body, of being in touch with your emotions, of a new, more acceptable kind of masculinity. The cluster of ideas here have quite a genealogy – the depth that comes with a history of suffering; the idea of the black as warmer, looser, less hung up than the white; the offensive notion of "natcherel riddim".

While white pop bases itself entirely around the form and the ethos of black passion, what's fascinating is that black pop has gone in the opposite direction, becoming colder, more inhuman – in the case of hip hop, more wound up, manacled; in the case of house, dispassionate, inexpressive, plastic.

Hip hop is (to abuse Eldridge Cleaver's fine phrase) – soul on ice – a survivalist retreat from engagement with the outside world or other people, back to the frozen shell of a minimal self. There's a new kind of relation to the body, not the slow suffusion of "getting in touch", but more domineering a regime, a priming of the machine in readiness for self-defence or massive retaliation.

This is the DIS'TOPIA. An eternal now forever teetering on the brink of extinction, a world without narrative (that's why "Rebel Without A Pause" is like a locked groove); the hip hop ego traverses a treacherous soundscape, constantly faces sonic ambush or mined terrain, always overcomes, can never rest.

Klaus Theweleit, in his book *Male Fantasies*, takes the Freikorps – First World War veterans who formed into right-wing militia in the postwar years in order to suppress proletarian uprisings, and who later became a substantial component of the Nazi streetfighting paramilitaries – and examines their correspondence, diaries, poetry and favoured literature in order to psychoanalyse their attitudes to women and femininity. He notes a startling consistency in the imagery used – women, women's sexuality, emotion (the feminine side of men) and popular communism are all approved in language of floods, lava, "streaming", unstanchable flows.

Theweleit suggests that masculinity is constructed around a chronic terror of being swept away on a tide of desire, of being swallowed up by oceanic feelings, of the borders of the self being dissolved, and that this fear goes back to the original moment of severing from the mother, the moment at which the male ego was constituted.

Men can only consolidate themselves by trampling again and again on femininity, both inside and outside themselves.

The relevance of this to hip hop should be fairly obvious. If soul singers like Al Green and Prince melt sexual divisions into a world of fluid, androgenic bliss, then hip hop freezes sexual divisions, hard. In more senses than one, hip hop is not a fluent music. As Chuck D actually said at one point, "Rap is like psychology – you can see people's insides". Are they a pretty sight?

Where do women fit into the Public Enemy picture? Do they?

"Of course, they have a place. Man is husband and woman is wife. You can only go to that point, with me. You can even have black women leaders to a degree. But I think that, where America has elevated a few women in a process of tokenism, in order to keep the black man down, as we said in 'Sophisticated Bitch', then I think it's maybe time to go back to some kind of original structure."

This reminds me of an open letter written by a Black Pantheress to a sister who was more feminist and had complained about black men's attitudes to their women: "Don't cut your black man's balls off, sister. Because the white man has already cut off his balls once, and how's he ever going to be a real man if you don't support him?"

You seem to be into firm, fixed borderlines – between races, between sexes, between straight and gay.

"Borderlines have to be set, because borderlines are there. If 10 whites and 10 blacks go to an interview, and 10 jobs are available, you can bet your life it ain't gonna be five/five, it'll be nine white jobs and one black. So, for us, there has to be cohesion. And men should be men and women should be women. And there's no room in the black race for gays; a black gay can't raise a kid, the kid's gonna be confused enough as it is being black. Lines have to be set. There has to be guidance. The shit has to be stable."

So uncertainty is a privilege, a luxury for white middle-class people (like me).

"Uncertainty is bullshit, as far as black people are concerned."

Farrakhan's name comes up again.

"You see, what someone like Farrakhan has to face is a hostile media who'll take what he says out of context. Like the 'Hitler was a great man' comment. What he meant was that he was a mighty and powerful man, not a good man. A great organiser of men."

I don't know; even a disinterested and dispassionate admiration for Hitler's leadership prowess is distasteful and highly suspect.

"Right now, we need leaders. We're the only people who can raise ourselves. I don't think anything will be achieved in my lifetime, but a start can be made and maybe in the next century we will be so strong and independent that only overt aggression will threaten us, a wave of lynching. Right now they don't need to destroy us, 'cos we're doing it to ourselves."

Finally I get to talk to Griff, leader of Security Of the First World, Public Enemy's security force and… well, it turns out to be rather more complex and peculiar than I'd imagined.

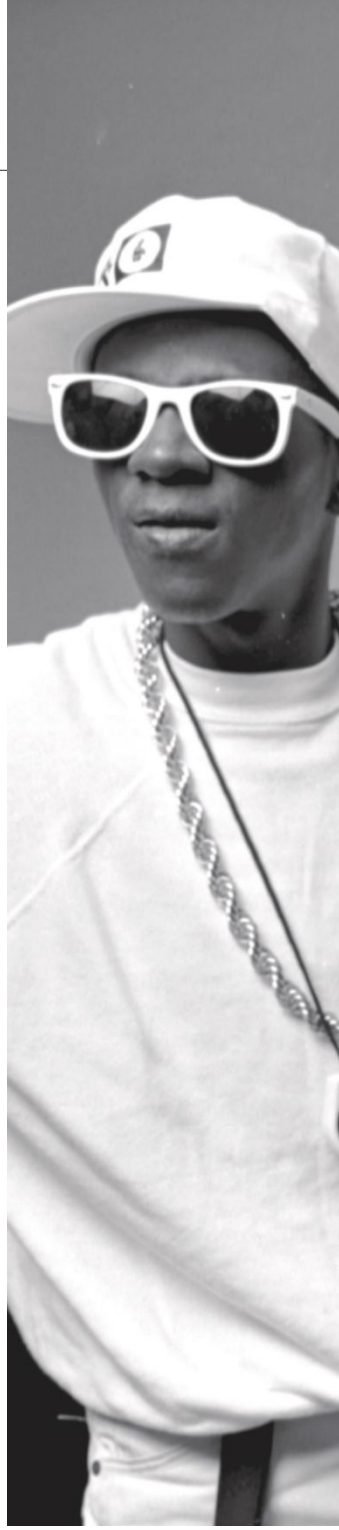
"The name Security Of The First World reflects our belief that Africa and Asia are not the Third World and that America is definitely not the First World. If you look at history you see that mathematics and science and all kinds of culture began in Africa and Asia.

"So our job is securing the knowledge of that history. Our job is the preservation of the young black mind. And that's a big task. We have meetings and discussion groups where we educate ourselves in our history and culture, or we discuss the present conditions of blacks in America and Africa.

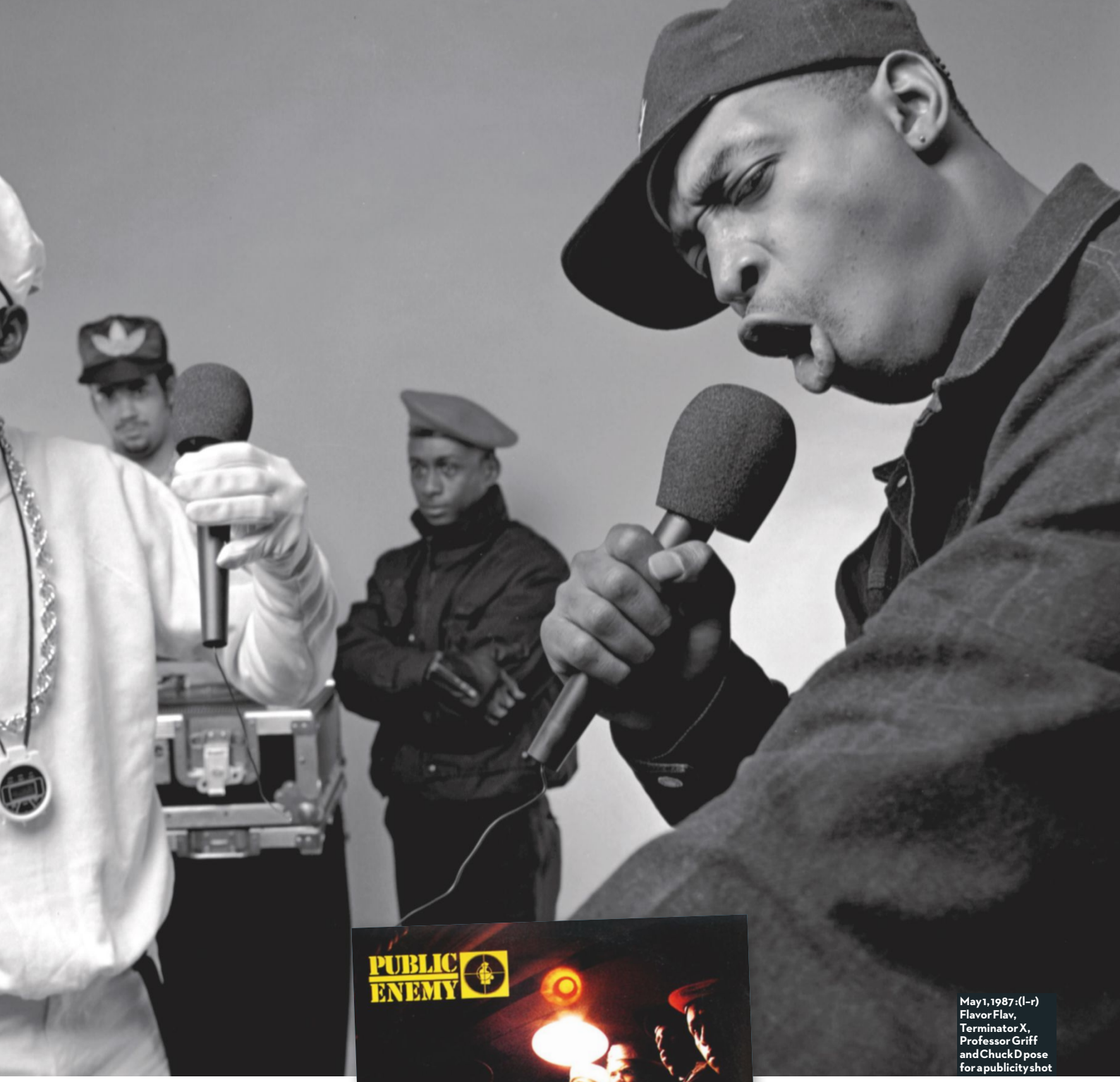
"But our main function is to attend concerts of Public Enemy. There we're on stage with the band in order to project images of strength and order, send signals to our people that these are young black men who are standing up, who ain't gonna back off, that's for sure.

"We're not trying to control their physical behaviour at the concert, although we can't have any rampaging; we're trying to control their mind, not their physical safety. We wanna indicate to them that there is an ability to bind and conform in a chaotic situation.

"We wear paramilitary uniform, because everybody wears uniform today – Gaddafi,

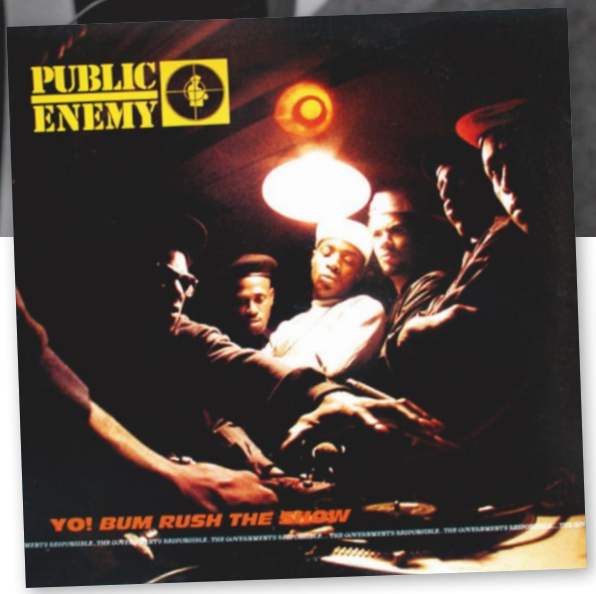


> "We need leaders. We're the only people who can raise ourselves"



May 1, 1987: (l–r) Flavor Flav, Terminator X, Professor Griff and Chuck D pose for a publicity shot

JACK MITCHELL / GETTY




Khomeini. What else do we do? We mingle with the crowd, we talk, we enlist. We've met up with Farrakhan's son. Everybody who joins gets involved in physical training. Martial arts."

So as to acquire a sense of one's own power?

"Because once you know yourself mentally and physically, you're better able to *deal*."

One of the things that struck me this trip was the way Americans use the word "to deal" intransitively – a sure indicator of the survivalist mindset of the whole nation.

"We do drill, it's called the Fruit Of Islam. It brings about harmonious totality among ourselves. Sixty guys all in one step."

Getting wasted on drink, drugs or women is right out.

Ahem. What can I say? Rectitude in the face of chaos. An admiration for Colonel Gaddafi ("Blacks in America didn't know who to side with"). Harmonious totality. No faggots. Uniform and drill.

It all sounds quite logical and needed, the way they tell it. And it's all very, very dodgy indeed.

If there's one thing more scary than a survivalist, it's a whole bunch of survivalists organised into a regiment. It must be that when a group of young men band together in a tight unit around a channelled mindset, a particular structure develops, and its pretty much the same structure, or "desiring machine", that's behind communist youth groups, the Boy Scouts, the Freikorps, any army anywhere in the world, and fascists.

Fortunately, Public Enemy and Security Of The First World are sufficiently powerless ("52 and growing") to remain fascinating to us pop swots, rather than disturbing.

"A lot of the critics pick up on the violence element, but they don't understand it's an analogy. It's like '*my Uzi weighs a ton*'. No gun weighs that much, it's a metaphor, a strong image, 'cos you got to grab people, wake them up. It's like if I hit you over the head with this stapler, you'd give me 100 per cent attention, for sure, maybe even 150 per cent! So what I'm doing is cracking heads, but verbally, and with NOISE."

Let's hope it stays that way. *Simon Reynolds* ●

The Wedding Present: "best British debut of the year"

ALBUMS REVIEW 1987

## ALBUMS

### The Wedding Present
**George Best** RECEPTION

Fondue sets... his 'n' hers pillow cases... reproduction cake stands... To the infallible rule that all Wedding Presents are both pitiably predictable and totally useless, our quartet of home-spun heroes are the only known exception. *George Best* triumphantly confirms that unique standing, being both a surprise and a thing of beauty.

Two days after the first time I ever saw The Wedding Present my jaw was still dragging and bumping along on the pavement behind me. The fact that they played, rather than thrashed, at that finger-shredding velocity left me startled. That *George Best* comes without a moment's respite from the sonic gale means I'm startled still. And yet, once you're used to the shock, and can hear past the surface clamour, you find both the surprise and the beauty...

The fact is, you see, that *George Best* uncovers what was somehow hidden in the breakneck emotional blitzkrieg of the WP's singles, namely that David Gedge is as good a lyricist as Britpop currently possesses. Here he's etched a dozen little love-scapes of sometimes quite breathtaking realism, a world fuelled by desire, lust, paranoia, romance and bitterness, yet distinctly more Dalston than *Dallas*, more Darlington than *Dynasty*. These are songs about fleeting eye contacts, snatched and forever treasured, about drunken kisses and casual betrayals, about girls who walk home a different way each night to avoid the airhead wolf-whistles. Real situations, real feelings, real people, real love.

And real does not translate into ordinary, because Gedge (like Costello, Morrissey, Bragg and Ray Davies, at their respective best) uses language – in his case, conversational and undecorated – to transform the personal and the mundane into the universal and the deeply affecting. Take, for example, the shrugging, spiteful resignation of "*Don't give me that/'Cos you were seen/Everyone thinks he looks daft/But you can have your dream*" ("Everyone Thinks He Looks Daft"); or the sickening sadness of "*Slowly your beauty is eaten away/By the scent of someone else in the blankets where we lay*" ("All This And More"); or the desperate chirpiness of "Don't Be So Hard", where the endlessly repeated line "*you're not like anyone I've ever met*" is eventually poisoned by the whispered outro "*at least not yet...*". It's as simple as this; for every face of the hoary old love thang, Dave Gedge has a new, and revealing, coat of paint.

In the present pop climate, The Wedding Present have been almost insanely brave. By refusing to make their music any more listener-friendly, or their lyrics any more sugary sweet, they hurl themselves wilfully into the face of accepted pop wisdom and maybe sacrifice the chance of Thursday nights out with Mel, Kim, Pepsi, Shirley and all the rest. But, that fleshy prospect notwithstanding, I reckon their courage has been utterly vindicated; Dave Gedge stands exposed as a prototype genius-next-door, while *George Best* is an unmitigated delight, the best British debut of the year, and the most remarkable contribution to humanity ever achieved by supporters of Leeds United.

*Danny Kelly, NME Oct 10*

### Pixies Come On Pilgrim 4AD

The debut, mini-LP by Boston's Pixies collapses into the slipstream of Throwing Muses, whom they are to support on their forthcoming British and European tour. Like the Muses, they ramble excitedly through post-punk textures – on the hammer-swinging "Caribou", imagine a gin-soaked Siouxsie circa "Melt", on "The Holiday Song", a stricken and emaciated Robert Smith stripped of his assets. The Pixies are audaciously, vitally loose, a snook at pop's current will to airtight efficiency, integration, the filling of every space.

By falling apart, digressing, cracking up, the Pixies conspire to create space – guitars and hollers relate only adjacently, give each other a wide berth. The wind blows clean through the amateurish Pixies. The structural untidiness, the holes rather than the "whole" of, say, "Nimrod's Son" suggest something larger, more porous than The Song.

Black Francis' vocals are curious rather than truly possessed, an eccentric mélange of roadside observations, sudden impulses, cracked anecdotes and failed high notes. It's a voice, now humorously, now urgently, on the edge of its tether, all tongue and tangle, flailing towards obscure ends, pulling along semi-collapsed song structures by the bit, then tripping in excitement.

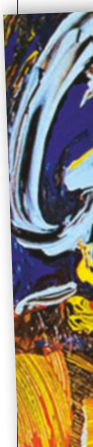
Having said all that, *Come On Pilgrim* isn't quite the tumble I'd anticipated – Pixies have further to depart yet. Their almost mocking predilection for lumps of post-punk noise still hampers them a little. Once they've got their last leg out of that horrible husk, they'll be sporting in the new guitar air with the rest of them. *David Stubbs, MM Oct 10*

### Gaye Bykers On Acid
**Drill Your Own Hole** VIRGIN

You know, when all the cows have come home to roost and all that, I feel certain that Gaye Bykers aren't completely hopeless. All the rust and junk is in there. The guitars are there, eye washed in pleasant enough shades of green. So, what goes wrong? Why ought they to change their name, with its imitations of multiple deviancy, to Thick Bykers On Beer?

Maybe it comes down to attitude – singer Mary's got too much of it. All through this album I feel the cold waft of a fist waving vaguely about my face. Or maybe they're felled

ANDREW CATLIN



by the slightest leverage of self-consciousness. I suspect – and this goes for the likes of Zodiac Mindwarp and Pop Will Eat Itself as well – that if the Bykers had been born in America they could have been the Butthole Surfers, completely moronic, abstractedly abrasive, their brains leaking and their bloated bodies oozing. As it is, the Bykers are too fatally sussed to produce a giant dung masterpiece like *Locust Abortion Technician*. They have the self-defeating nouse to daub themselves in Judge Dredd-ish colours and shapes (that sort of cartoon) refer tacitly to The Monkees ("Zen Express"), T Rex ("Motorvate"), fall into half-remembered *Clockwork Orange* and *Blade Runner* postures. It's all very British, all wink and sideshow.

The music? The Bykers' problem is that they're never up in the air, never bowel-deep. There's gruff motormouth motoric Mary up there with his crotch splayed on the handlebars, with the rest of the band riding pillion. On "World War 7 Blues" they rise, horribly cocky, to something like Judas Priest with a small, blunt instrument instead of a dick. On "Drive In Salvation" they descend correctively into a swamp-like seizure. Every track begins with a slow, ominous emergence, like a junk creature from a swamp, but peep between your fingers and you'll see that all it is is a wee rock spanner.

The Bykers don't lack trouser-seat, but they lack bottom. They're crusty rather than substantial. The sleeve lists dedications to "The Mosh Crew" and The Mutoid Waste Co, the sort of supportive rumps who will ensure that the Bykers, or somebody like them, re-emerge again and again, a little rustier, a little dirtier.

Review copies of *Drill Your Own Hole* come without a hole in the middle. A mere prod of my pen, however, was enough to puncture one. *David Stubbs, MM Nov 7*

My Bloody Valentine: "Strawberry Wine" doesn't effervesce

## SINGLES REVIEW 1987

### The Cure
### Just Like Heaven
FICTION

I'm at a loss as how to greet and chronicle this important event, knowing full well that one facetious crack out of line could see my assistant editor taking a sudden interest in the Edgar Broughton Band and dispatching me with strange zeal to review their gig at the Crewe Corn Exchange on Saturday night. What can I say? At least it doesn't sound like Dexys Midnight Runners like the one before last did. It's a colourful, fluffy, fluttery, fussy thing, a mere transcription of the Down With Skool! graphic on the sleeve. Unimpeachable, really, but turns my face green, as if having consumed too many truffles. *MM Oct 10*

### My Bloody Valentine
### Strawberry Wine LAZY

Right, Cyclops is already bored with faster and faster. His new criterion for what makes great pop is: does it make time stand still in a haze of anticipation and intangible nostalgic lust? My Bloody Valentine probably don't know what the hell that means, but there is one bit – after the first chorus on their wispy, willowy blackcurrant-rock song – where they swallow mercury and just for a second, just for a glimmer, I was on... It doesn't really effervesce, it's tamer and perhaps more durable (suspect but not condemnatory adjective) than their live thrash-outs. However, I'm told they're much too slothful to ever be "successful", and this endears them to me immensely, especially if they're often mistaken for "pensive" when in fact they're "vacant". Not without drops of promise.

As for time standing still, we approach now what is, to be unreasonably reasonable, the richest fabrication of this last-exit-before-the-Christmas-supersavers week... *MM Nov 21*

### Paul McCartney
### Once Upon Long Ago PARLOPHONE
### Roger Waters
### The Tide Is Turning (After Live Aid) EMI

This year's McCartney Christmas No 2 catches me off guard, having been severely weakened and embarrassed by the ecstasy half the best-of job is doing me in with. "Jet"! "My Love"! Magical and black lamblike, I swear. Odd, isn't it? The other half is disgraceful, and this particular nursery rhyme stands proudly with one hoof in each puddle, which is not good for its groin.

Roger Waters is a new English comedian. "*The thought of my little ones burning*" is his best alternative corker here. Another good bit is where he says "*crap*" and it's, like, really rude, so that's scuppered his chances of ousting Rick Astley for The Big One That Matters So Very Much Honestly All Of Us Here At Radio 1 Lose Sleep About It And Sometimes Even Can't Manage Sex With Our Wives – the (*fanfare*) Christmas Number 1! *MM Nov 21*

### The Fall
### Hit The North
BEGGARS BANQUET

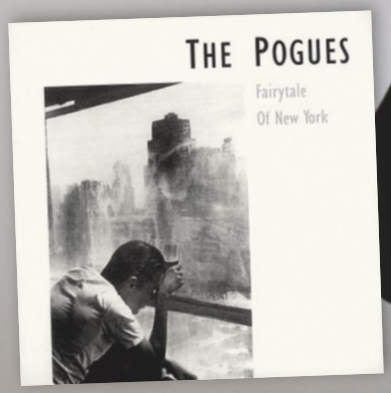
I've hated everything they've ever done, but this is great – sounds like Van Der Graf Generator. They usually whinge and moan a lot because they come from up north, but we won't get into that. This is really good – it's got a nice tune and a party mood, luvvie. It sounds like The Glitter Band, too, which is great because, in the past, Mark Smith has claimed his lyrics are really important because he's a northerner, but you don't hear what he's on about on here. *MM Oct 24*

### Freddy Mercury & Montserrat Caballé
### Barcelona POLYDOR

In the most curious matching of talents known to man, Freddy settles back in the armchair and whinges a bit while the weighty Montserrat leaps around yodelling and warbling wildly. He's never been the same since "Bohemian Rhapsody". *MM Oct 31*

AJ BARRATT / PHOTOSHOT / GETTY

# "Why don't we put out a real Christmas single?"

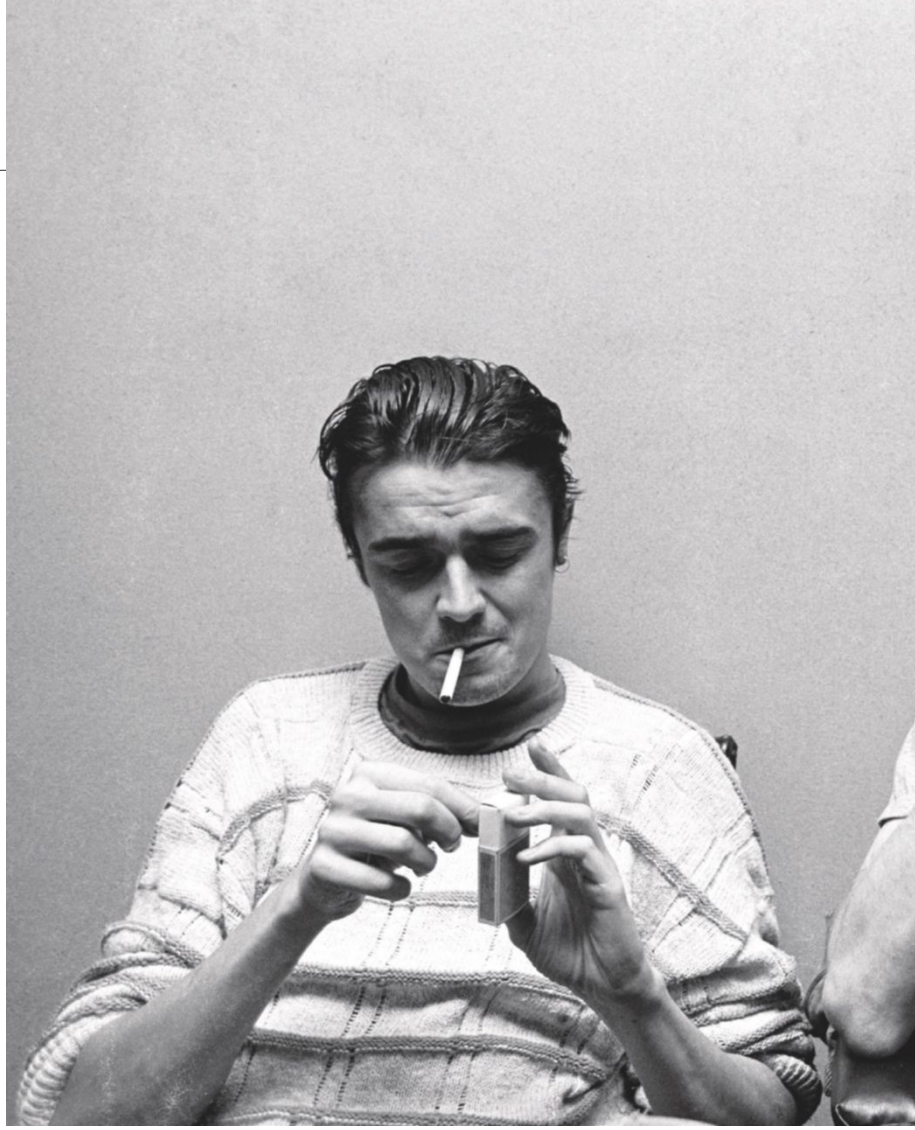



**THE POGUES celebrate the festive season with a new single, "Fairytale Of New York", and play a date with special guest JOE STRUMMER. "As a human being, I've been grossly overrated," confesses Shane MacGowan. "But I think I've been underrated as a songwriter."**

***"You were handsome/ You were pretty...":*** **"Fairytale Of New York" duetters Kirsty MacColl and Shane MacGowan in 1987**

TIM RONEY / GETTY

## — MELODY MAKER NOVEMBER 28 —



**IT WAS 2.30pm** and it was too early, much too early for The Pogues to be up and about.

Shane MacGowan lay stretched out along the seating, fast asleep, in the Camden Electric Ballroom, while Andrew Ranken, Darryl Hunt and Philip Chevron sat lethargically around a table in a nearby pub, staring into their glasses of orange and bitter lemon. Spider Stacy just about made it in for last orders and a shot of fire-water, crackling to life with a cheerfulness that was a relief but also an intrusion into his pocket of awful silence.

Back in the Ballroom, someone was waking Shane. The singer opened bleary eyes, reached for the bottle of port and emptied it.

"There's a place round here where you can drink all day," he muttered several times, finally ambling off out of the building and into a French restaurant a few doors along. He ordered one drink (a bottle of wine) and, as an afterthought, a couple of starters: tomatoes with basil and a bowl of snails, both requested *en français*, an endearingly individual *français*.

We spent a lazy, friendly afternoon in here, the singer and myself, although its revitalising qualities did not extend to Shane, who seemed as groggy, as uncoordinated, going out as he had coming in.

Several hours and a soundcheck later, we were back in the restaurant, only this time the company had expanded. On my left, Mr Joe Strummer, about to make his first live appearance in more than three years as special guest of The Pogues. On my right, the ubiquitous Spider, banjo player Jem Finer and Shane MacGowan, who had undergone a remarkable transformation. Sobered up and sharpened up, he appeared to be on edge, tapping an irritable finger on the table top and snapping at various well-meaning enquiries, the earlier good humour giving way to a certain suspiciousness now that we'd arrived at the official conversation.

There was, however, no jiggery-Poguery afoot on my part, no inclination to be critical, for instance, of the drinking aspects of the band. Far be it…! Yet to broach the subject was to ask for a prickly response from MacGowan, who was clearly anticipating the sort of finger-wagging reprimands that the press, from time to time, have felt obliged to deliver.

The Pogues, in the past, have been accused of irresponsibility in encouraging young fans to drink more than the doctor would've ordered. As an additional consequence of their associations with the demon alcohol, the group have been taken less seriously, in certain quarters, than they deserve. In view of these things, there would seem to be a case for a drying out, or at least a watering down, of their own approach.

"Ten years or a bit longer ago, when I used to go and see gigs – The Faces, Mott The Hoople, Lou Reed – everybody would go in the pub, get a bit drunk and then go to the gig," retorted Shane hotly, the tapping on the table getting louder by the second. "I still do it on a night off. What's the law against that? There isn't a law against it, for God's sake. It's what people have always done – go and get drunk and see The Pogues."

"The Faces used to have a cabinet of wine on stage with them, Liebfraumilch, chilled to the right temperature," added Jem.

"Later on, it was bottles of brandy," carried on Shane. "But this new puritanism that we have today hadn't come in then."

"We don't need to justify what we do," said Jem. Our audiences have a really good time. It's not a violent, negative thing at all."

Having spent many a merry evening with a pint in my hand and The Pogues on stage, I'd personally be horrified if they ever did attempt to clean up the great big boisterous barroom that's their stage and their auditorium. At the same time, as Spider says, it's "really annoying" that certain casual observers are content to think in caricatures, only want the image, are distracted by it from the worth of the songs, are oblivious to MacGowan's own ingenuity. As a lyricist, particularly, Shane's a lot more sensitive, imaginative and evocative than some people give him credit for, although he himself is reluctant to agree with me there.

"I don't think I've been underestimated as a lyricist – well, perhaps I have by the press, but not by the audience. They know all the bloody words, a lot of them anyway. As a human being, I've been grossly overrated. But I think I've been underrated as a songwriter."

> "I haven't got anything in common with the actual part I'm singing"

As a songwriter, Shane, in collaboration with Jem, has excelled himself with The Pogues' new single, a Christmas song called "Fairytale Of New York".

Described somewhat misleadingly by MacGowan as "a bit like 'Bohemian Rhapsody'", it moves through two separate moods, the first slow and lyrical, Shane's rasp catching not only in his own throat but ours too, and the second sprightly, brilliantly tuneful, a bright duet between Shane and Kirsty McColl. The vocal interplay simply sparkles as the story unfolds, through characterisation, of an elderly couple, the life they have and the life they once imagined they'd have.

"We thought, 'Why don't we put out a real Christmas single that isn't a lot of tosh,'" explained Shane. "And then it was a challenge to write a duet. It's set in New York because the idea that I had seemed like a New York sort of tune, an Irish-American Broadway thing, with an American music-hall feel.

"My part in the duet is the man who's got kicked out of the drunk tank on Christmas Eve night. His wife's in hospital, she's ill, and he's just out of his skull. Then they're having a row and he keeps on bringing it on back to the good times and she keeps handing out all this shit.

"I haven't got anything in common with the actual part I'm singing – Yul Brynner isn't really the King Of Siam – except in the sense that I've had arguments with women and they've had arguments with me and it's usually ended up with some kind of reconciliation. That's what the song's about, but it's in New York and they're old and going back to a long time ago when they got there, full of hopes, full of dreams.

STEPHEN PARKER / ALAMY

MacGowan and Pogues tin whistle player/tray basher/backing vocalist Spider Stacy shortly before the release of "Fairytale Of New York" on November 23, 1987

"The guy is whining and saying, 'Forgive me,' and she's saying, 'Fuck it, you're a waste of space.' She's right and so's he. They're both right and they're both wrong. But in the end they start getting sentimental and thinking about this and that, like old people do.

"I've spent a lot of time talking to old people, lots of relatives, old people in bars over the years. That's what 'A Pair Of Brown Eyes' is like – a guy getting some kind of suss from meeting an old guy in a bar. I try to learn from people. You can meet someone in a bar who can often tell you things that blow your mind, make you think of things completely different."

I asked Shane for his most vivid personal memory of a stranger in a bar, but sadly none came to mind.

"He can't remember!" chortled Strummer. "He has no recollection!"

**THE COMBINATION OF** The Pogues and Joe Strummer, unlikely as it may seem, has resulted from a succession of meetings over the years.

"We supported The Clash a long time ago at the Academy in Brixton," recalled Jem, tracing the beginnings of the friendship. "I've always been impressed by people who've been very successful that are just like ordinary people."

"Joe's really down-to-earth, completely unassuming, rather than a jumped-up upstart," chipped in Spider. "We did *Straight To Hell* together and we got to know Joe more. Then we were doing a TV show in Dublin earlier in the year and we decided to ask Joe if he'd like to be one of our special guests. The rest is history."

"I would never have accepted an invitation from anybody else, you know," said Strummer. "They're from the same tradition as The Clash. I don't wish to draw any divisions within the scene, but The Pogues are definitely from my side of the tracks. They're definitely something I can understand. I was really impressed when I heard their instrumental music in *Sid And Nancy*. I'd been thinking of one-dimensional Pogues, and when I heard that, I realised that they had depth to them, this fabulous depth.

"They called me and said, 'Come up to Camden [Electric] Ballroom.' It's a room that I've decorated with my own sweat on more than one occasion. I must confess to being a bit nervous. I'm frightened as hell…"

"It scares the shit out of me too," said Shane. "All that mania going on out there – it's been getting more and more manic in the last year or so. People are shouting at you, asking you questions you can't hear, shouting your name, keeping on shouting at you until you at least pretend to hear what they're saying."

"You get people wanting you to give them plectrums and picks during a song," said Jem. "And some people seem to have this strange attitude that you can play a song and still have a conversation with them at the same time."

"Or even more ridiculous, that you can *sing* a song and have a conversation with them at the same time," added Shane. "A lot of the time on the road, I feel a nervous wreck. There's a lot of pressure.

"People are shouting and screaming at you all the way. You get hassled by people grabbing you, wanting to talk to you, asking you why they can't get in free, telling you why they didn't like your last record."

"It's a completely unnatural way of living," said Jem. "You cease to have any existence in your own right. To actually have any peace and quiet becomes very difficult. We're not really that pushed on being stars."

The following is the Shane MacGowan guide to your favourite hassles, in order of popularity:

"They want autographs. They want something that you own. They want to have their picture taken with you. 'Why don't you play such and such a song?' 'When are you playing in the vicinity again?' 'Do you want to come and have a drink?' – not any more I don't, no. 'When's the new album coming out?' 'Why did Cait leave?' 'Do you remember me from Blackburn?' 'I was the one who was throwing mud at you at Glastonbury'…"

Strummer: "Do you wanna fuck me?"

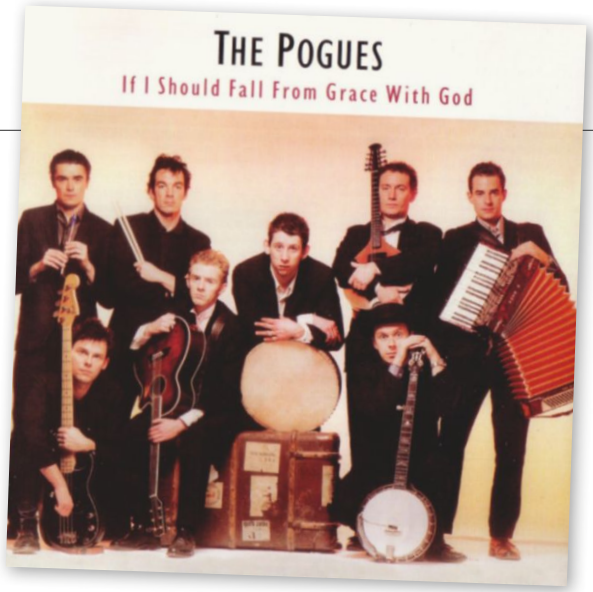
Shane: "Will you make it clear it was him who said that?" And in answer to the inevitable question: "I've had a few propositions."

The relationship between The Pogues and Joe Strummer seems a good deal more comfortable, more basic perhaps, than their dealings with U2, who requested The Pogues as support on a series of gigs in Ireland, Britain, Europe and America.

Spider: "I first met Bono in Cork when U2 had just played. I went up and said, 'How are you? What was the gig like?' He said, 'They've suffered in the city. They have a great spirit, they have great hearts, great souls.' I said, 'Bono, I just wanted to know what the gig was like.' I think he was on mushrooms. Either that or he'd had a very heavy prayer session. But they're all really nice blokes. Diamond geezers."

It's silly, but even after all this time, I keep expecting Shane MacGowan to talk with an Irish accent, probably because he sings in one. He looked peeved to be reminded of the contradiction.

"It's impossible to sing an Irish song, to put feel and emotion into it, without going into some kind of Irish accent," he commented, a little grumpily. "You can't sing Verdi in an English accent. You have to sing it in an Italian accent." »




Born one Christmas Day in Kent, where his parents were on holiday, he moved back to Ireland with the family, where he remained, for six formative years, in Dublin and Tipperary. Still his affinity, his passion for Ireland is all-consuming, as vital to his thinking, to his preoccupations, as it is to his music. He keeps a close eye on all of the local bands on his half-dozen visits a year, citing The Real Wild West, Hothouse Flowers and Fleadh Cowboys ("the only really great country band that Ireland has ever produced") as the best of the current crop. He similarly keeps tabs on the social and political issues of the day, rages at the injustices of the existing situation.

Nowhere is that anger more inflamed, more directly articulated, than on "Birmingham Six", a forthcoming album track which explores the predicament of the Irishmen in court at the moment, protesting their innocence of the bombing charge for which they were convicted 10 years ago, now that fresh evidence in their favour has emerged.

*"And the filth get promotion, but they're still doing time / Being Irish in the wrong place and at the wrong time,"* he snarls over fierce verses, verses which hammer out hard in startling contrast to the placid, richly melodic ring of the choruses.

"The Birmingham Six are on appeal in this country for doing a bombing that they didn't do," said Shane. "It's just so disgusting and offensive. The song does also mention the things that go on in Ireland, the guys that got shot in the back of the neck by the SAS in Armagh, but the main thing is the Birmingham Six and the Guildford Four. All the evidence is that it was a set-up in Birmingham. The judges' whole trip is to spot the fuck-up in the laws and find against it. It's obvious the letter of the law wasn't followed in this case, originally."

Harassment of the Irish in England is something that Shane claims personal knowledge of: "I know five or six people that have been followed over here from the North of Ireland and watched by Special Branch and raided early in the morning and locked up for seven days and not charged. I've been taken in the room a couple of times, years ago when I was admittedly a fairly scruffy individual. I've been questioned a lot, I've been strip-searched. I've had to take my trousers down."

> "I've been questioned a lot, I've been strip-searched"

Given the band's outspoken interest in the affairs of Ireland, it didn't seem out of place to ask for a view on the Enniskillen bombing. Unfortunately, this sent Shane off into another of his huffs, the finger tapping disconcertingly as he demanded to know the reason for the question.

"The Enniskillen bombing was a stupid thing to do, a revolting thing to do," he finally ventured. "I don't want to say anything personally…"

"It was horrible and it was self-defeating," added Jem.

"I don't believe in killing Irish people anyway," said Shane. "I don't believe in killing anybody, but some people are legitimate targets."

"If you see yourself as fighting a war," said Jem hastily.

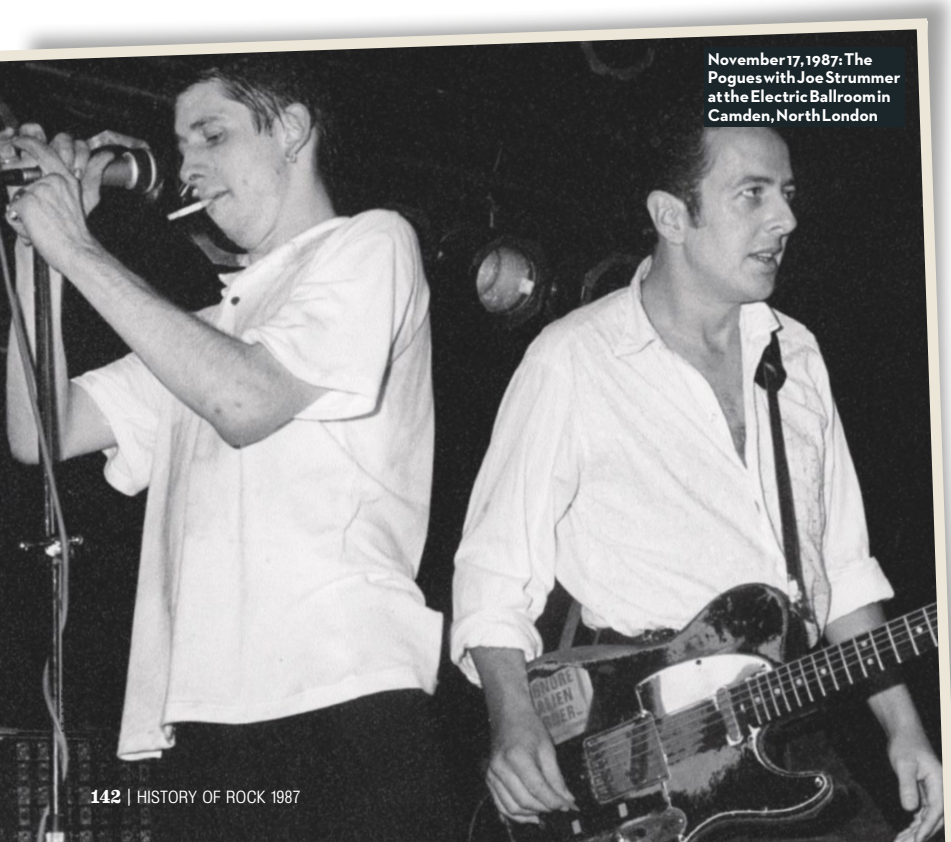
"Armed people are legitimate targets," Shane concluded. "If you're carrying a gun, if you're prepared to shoot somebody, you've got to be prepared to die yourself."

**JUDGING BY THE** few tracks I've heard, the new album, *If I Should Fall From Grace With God*, due out in the new year, should prove to be The Pogues' most complete, convincing and commercial work yet. Proudly said by the band to contain "no fillers", it was recorded virtually live with Steve Lillywhite at the controls, and for all of its inherent Poguishness, its inescapable Irishness, it finds the group exploring all sorts of diverse possibilities in sound and style, mood and word, the lyrical ferocity of a "Birmingham Six" counterbalanced by bursts of humour and flights of fancy.

"Turkish Song Of The Damned" was named after an amusing misunderstanding with a German fan who'd been trying to ask The Pogues if they'd heard "The Turkey Song" by The Damned. Musically, this one's an intrigue, an odd but effective blend of Greek, Turkish and Irish influences which ends in an accelerating whirl, "like *Zorba The Greek*". Lyrically, it's a fantasy.

"It's an 18th-century ghost story," said Shane.

"There's this guy who's been on a shipwreck but managed to get away with all the money, lots of money. For years, he's been dancing, drinking, screwing and going out on the beach, and every time he hears this wailing and the dervishing, he's just waiting for his shipmates to come back and get him. Then the ship comes back up and his best mate comes back and there's a knock on his door… It's about guilt."


November 17, 1987: The Pogues with Joe Strummer at the Electric Ballroom in Camden, North London

**THE ELECTRIC BALLROOM** was packed to suffocation point, the humidity count reaching almost unbearable levels as the throngs danced and sang and accorded The Pogues one of the wildest receptions I've ever seen, a reception which became even more hysterical with the arrival on stage of Joe Strummer, leading the band through encores of "London Calling" and "I Fought The Law" and later declaring the whole night "wonderful".

The Pogues, for their part, were wonderful enough on their own to come back after Strummer, to build on the existing fever with an affectionate gallop through "Maggie May", triggering a massive exhilaration that remained in the building, fizzing through the atmosphere, long after the crowds had gone home.

I was reminded of something that Shane had said earlier: "All I want is for people to like the music, to like the tunes and to have a good night out every now and again." I think we had one at Camden… *Carol Clerk* •

# Readers' letters

**MM/NME JUL–DEC** The Smiths' afterlife, Eldritch's ego, Albini's hotness and more.

## RIP, The Smiths

To all suicidal Smiths apostles.

So, goodbye Smiths… but remember all you charming people who have cherished and followed the handsome four for so long – when Morrissey closes a door he opens a window.

And so, Stephen will embark on a scintillating new career which will without doubt touch our innermost emotions, awaken our latent sentiments as all those last Smiths masterpieces did over the years. His sensitivity (and coy sensuality) haven't changed with his circumstances. The deep beauty of Morrissey's words will live on and continue to thrive in his new work. Don't despair, he won't desert us. Johnny, Andy and Mike will embark on their respective careers also. Though The Smiths have separated, the perfect unit they formed will continue to exist.

On a lighter note, have you noticed the striking resemblance between Gary Crowley, Billy Bragg and Colin Vearncombe? Uncanny.

**MORRISSEY'S GYRATING HIPS, Scotland (*MM* Sept 26)**

What was Madonna doing the day Elvis died? What do The Smiths do now that they have died? What would have Elvis thought of The Smiths? What were The Smiths doing when they heard the Madonna dates had been announced? What would Elvis have done if he was the father of Madonna's child? Is Sean Penn the replacement for Johnny Marr? Did Johnny Marr play on the Sun sessions? What would Casey Kasem have to say about the matter? Makes you think, eh?

**Johnny *NME* Reader, Barnet (*NME* Aug 29)**

## RIP, "sexy" Big Black

I deplore the craven, pathetic priorities of the person who allocated such a minuscule space for the review of the new (and final) Big Black LP, *Songs About Fucking*, while giving The Smiths enough coverage to snugly wrap a brace of down-and-outs.

Wouldn't you rather be sung to sleep by Norman Wisdom than endure yet another rheumatic Morrissey attack? Your readers should know – Big Black were the funniest, grooviest and best-mannered pop group ever. They are also furiously sexy.

FRANS SCHELLEKENS / GETTY

The final irony was lost on everyone. The Smiths never were, they were just Big Black in tasteless disguise. If you'd been smarter you'd have noticed that their careers ran hideously parallel. Right to the point where their guitarists left at the very same time. Why else were Big Black the only group that Johnny Marr never jammed with? You fools.

**BELLE GUINNESS, N16 (*NME* Sept 26)**

## The ego has landed

Steve Sutherland's interview with Andrew Eldritch was absolutely appalling and could quite easily have filled up *Private Eye*'s Pseuds Corner column for the next two years. I quote: "It's time we redefined the difference between man and beast. It's nothing to do with how many legs you walk on; it's everything to do with the possession of irony. I know people who are animals."

What does this MEAN exactly? At best, it's a rather crude and confusing way to elaborate a simple, if uninteresting, theme; at worst, it's just pretentious drivel. I fear the latter is closer to the truth.

Eldritch is egocentric [*No flies on you! – Backlash Ed*] and as a result 99 per cent of what he says is his image talking and is not remotely sincere. Such contrived facades – however carefully thought out – are never impregnable. There was so much contradiction in what Eldritch said, so much worth leaping on, yet the chance was wasted. A merciful release indeed!

**EDWARD WHITMORE, Newick, Sussex (*MM* Sept 26)**

## Grebo corner

Further to recent correspondence concerning the origins of Pop Will Eat Itself, I should like to put in my twopenn'orth. I knew "Graham" of PWEI when he was unemployed in Stourbridge. I can't reveal my real name, because he would kick the shit out of me. I used to stand behind him in the dole queue when they would insult the counter clerk.

One day, Graham decided he would slag off the young fellow behind the counter. "Bloody student," he chanted wittily. "I've got no job and I've got no CSEs!"

Unfortunately, the student turned on him and said, "Funny, I remember you from college when you used to stagger round pissed and dance to the Bee Gees at Geogsoc discos. You were a prat then and you're a prat now."

Graham fell into a stunned silence amid the laughter of his chums and we never saw him again, because he got a job with his dad's building firm and had to wear a suit and tie, which, I am told, made his acne go crazy. Please don't give this jerk any more coverage as he is a student thug and a wanker.

**MORRIS MINOR (pseudonym), Birmingham (*NME* Aug 29)**

## The fans salute the critics

In the big bang beginning there was Nick Cool, with Macdonald, Tyler, maybe Bell later on. Then, surely, Burchill, Parsons, Baker. "The fi(s)ts and the fury."

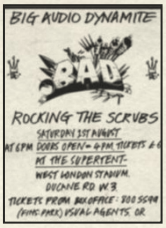
Best came last. Money, Penman, Bohn, Kopf, Hoskyns, Godhead!

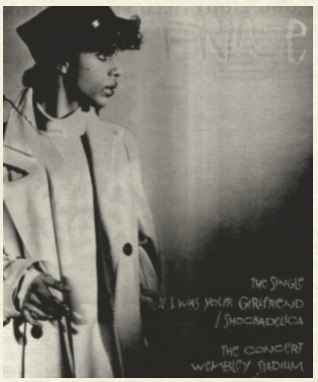
Soon it was over. Lights out. 1972 – 82. Pop journalism RIP. Finished.

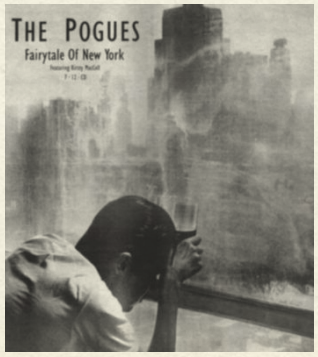
Enter Reynolds, Roberts, Stubbs, Studs, Oldfield. "A drop of the hard(est) stuff,"; love(ly) wor(l)ds (apart), the language, and so, at long last, come again? A return to the things that count the most: sex, lust, jokes, fucking, fighting, dancing, flirty flighty obsessions, godlike genius, Prince, Madonna, New Order, Donna Summer, Barry White, the pleasure principle, pop music as God intended it. Never po-faced (see Gabriel in this week's *NME*), often pretentious (keep that up!). No Bragg, no pubs, out of the Odeons and into the heavens – as serious as it gets, as co(s)mic as (a) fuck, taken extremely at all times and in all ways, always the widest vision, a sense of history/humour/wonder. "As far as I'm concerned…this is as political and liberating as entertainment can get" (King Tuum).

Rock'n'roll, phew, analyse it to fuck, Simon, yes! Celebrate it to death, Jonh – of course!

**PAUL LESTER, Sheffield (*MM* Dec 12)**







# THE HISTORY OF ROCK

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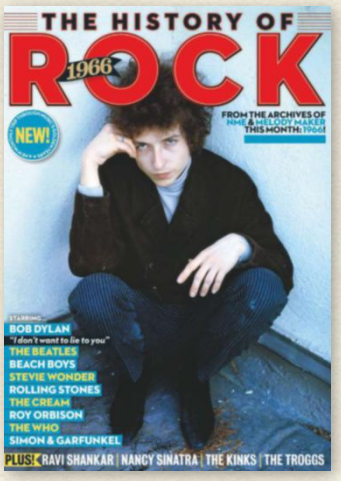
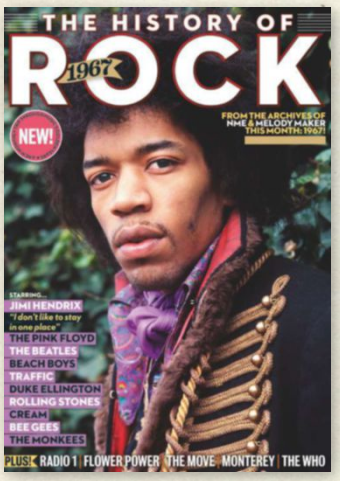
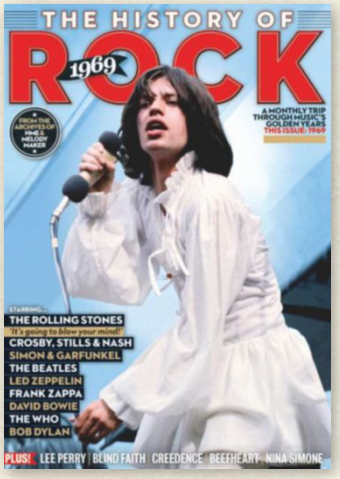
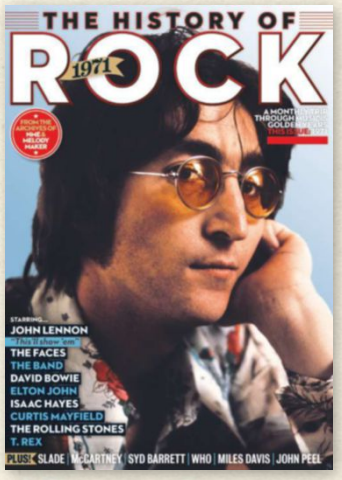
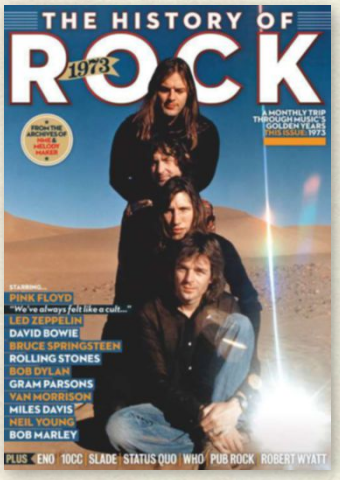


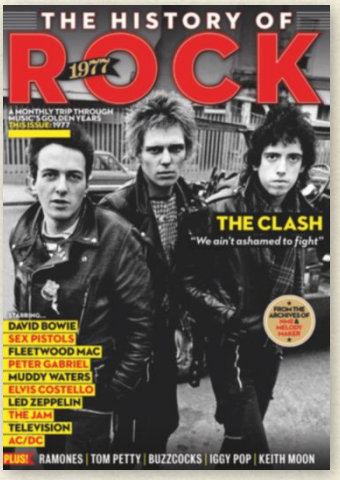



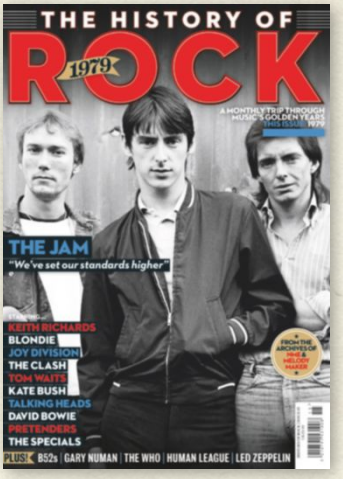


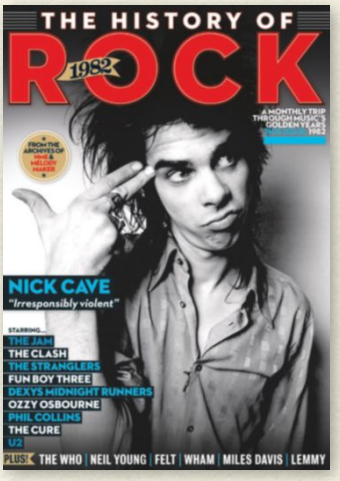


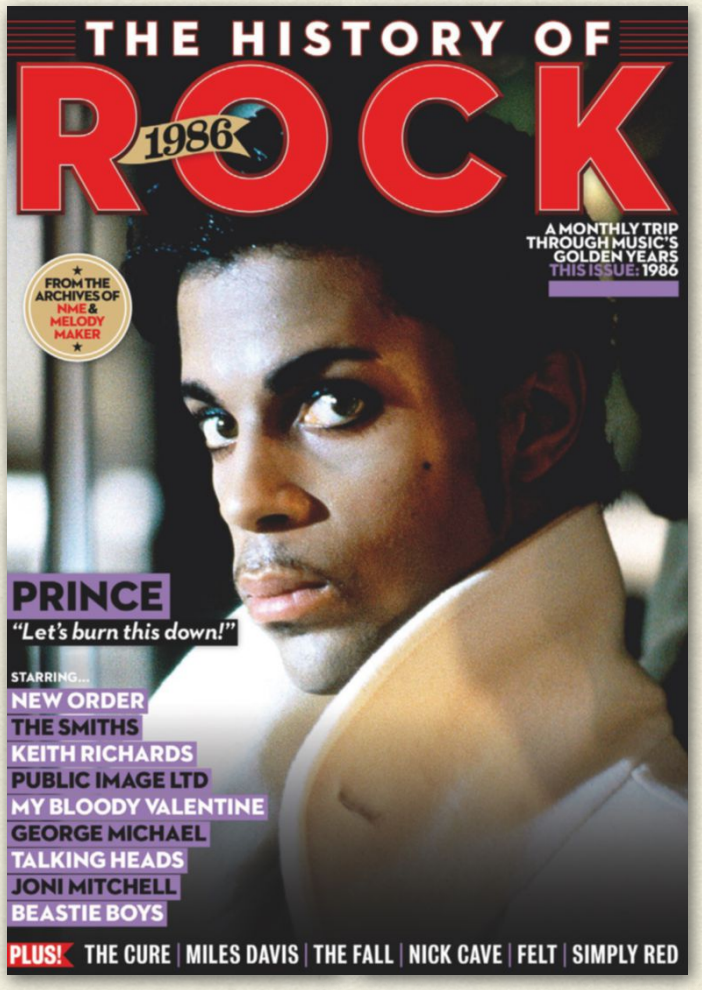


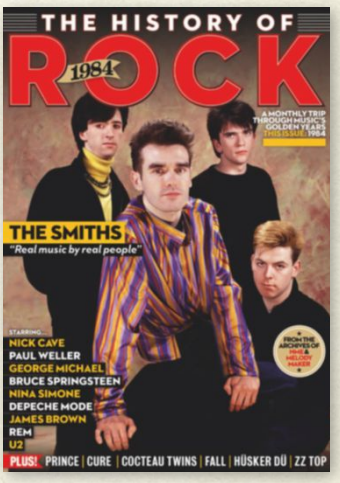

The greatest stories from the pages of *NME* and *Melody Maker* revisited in a monthly trip through music's golden years.









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# Coming next... in 1988!

**SO THAT WAS** 1987… Hope your thighs looked thin when photographed.

But that's far from it from our reporters on the beat. The staffers of *NME* and *Melody Maker* enjoyed unrivalled access to the biggest stars of the time, and cultivated a feel for the rhythms of a diversifying scene; as the times changed, so did they. While in pursuit of the truth, they unearthed stories that have come to assume mythical status.

That's very much the territory of this monthly magazine. Each month, *The History Of Rock* will be bringing you verbatim reports from the pivotal events in pop culture, one year a month, one year at a time.

Next up, 1988.

## NICK CAVE

**THE BAD SEED** contemplates the seriousness of his position in the context of the pop form. "I don't think 'the form' has died, or anything. I think it's just had its catharsis of creativity for this 15 years or so."

## LEONARD COHEN

**THE CANADIAN POET/SONGWRITER** returns, to a collective swoon. People like his new album, *I'm Your Man*, though he is unsure how exactly to take this.

"When one lives in a state of acute self-criticism, it's always a surprise when someone likes something you do."

What causes that self-criticism?

"The evidence accumulates."

## ROBERT PLANT

**THE FORMER LED ZEP** singer addresses the influence of his former band. Not least on himself.

"My solo career has meandered self-consciously between total amnesia and rejection of anything I might've been doing before 1982," he says, "and an inexplicable desire to write songs with no choruses."

## PLUS...

## JAMES BROWN!
## RED HOT CHILI PEPPERS!
## MORRISSEY!

FROM THE MAKERS OF **UNCUT**

# THE HISTORY OF ROCK 1987

Every month, we revisit long-lost *NME* and *Melody Maker* interviews and piece together *The History Of Rock*. This month: 1987.
*"I wanna reach out/And touch the flame"*

*Relive the year...*

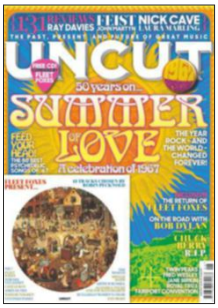
**U2 SPREAD THE WORD ABOUT *THE JOSHUA TREE***

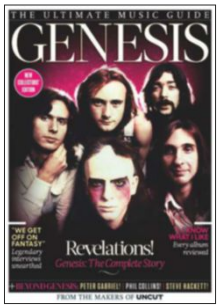
**THE SMITHS WENT THEIR SEPARATE WAYS**

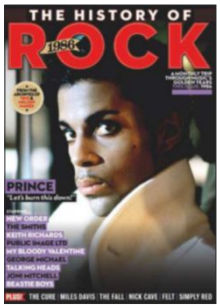
**GUNS N' ROSES LIVED UP TO THEIR BAD REPUTATION**

...and **THE CURE, TOM WAITS, GEORGE MICHAEL, REM, THE FALL, BJÖRK** and many more shared everything with *NME* and *MELODY MAKER*

More from **UNCUT**...





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